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## FORTUNE FAVORS FOOLS

*A Musical Comedy at the Court of the Czar*

BY IVAN NARODNY

*Translated from the Russian by Maria Ossipovna Mieler*

### CHARACTERS

1. ELENA, the prima donna of the court. Tall, blonde, dignified, and poetic. Wears the costume of a Boyarina.
  2. VERA, the prima ballerina of the court. Dark, lively, and slightly coquettish. Wears the little Russian national costume.
  3. VASSKA, the court actor. Smooth-shaven, tall, lively, and with a commanding appearance. Wears the Boyaren costume.
  4. VANKA, the court dancer. Small, slender, vivacious, and with romantic traits. Wears the little Russian national costume.
  5. PRINCE ROSTOFF, the body-guard of the Czar. Imposing, mannerly, slightly conceited. Wears the uniform of a Circassian officer.
  6. FATHER FEODOSI, the court singer. Stout, ponderous, cowardly, and speaks with a hoarse voice. Wears a long beard and the garb of a Russian monk.
  7. BALASHOFF, the court fool. The comedian of the Imperial ballet. Tries to be serious and romantic.
- The sentinel, the stage manager, etc.

### SCENE

*The greenroom of the imperial vaudeville, built in the Byzantine style, with two windows in the back to garden, through which are visible trees, court-*

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yard and a pacing sentinel. One door, left, leads to the stage, one in the back to the courtyard. A big Russian porcelain stove burns in the left corner, in the right a group of ikons with a burning lamp before it. Several couches, taburets, and chairs in the old Russian style. One Russian washstand with basin and towels near the stove. One table, right, with a kerosene lamp on it, and the other, left, with a boiling samovar, glasses, sugar-bowl, plates with refreshments and a big earthen vessel. A big trunk in the center on which are mirrors, paints, powder boxes, and various small things. A shelf on the side wall with theatrical implements, among which are wedding crowns, masks, pistols, dishes, and bottles. Boxes here and there on the floor. The clothes of the actors and the actresses hang in confusion on the wall or lie on the boxes. The room is in the greatest disorder. When the stage door opens one can see a little of the setting. Night. The room is dimly lighted.

(VASSKA washing his face at the washstand, ELENA sitting at the table powdering and painting her face. VASSKA laughs, stops his ablutions as if thinking of something, and again laughs.)

Elena (looks up seriously).—Vasska, what are you laughing at? (VASSKA, unable to reply, stops a moment and again laughs.) Well, what's the matter with you? (VASSKA throws up his hands and staggers to a taburet, continuing to roar. She looks more strangely at him, then at herself, and seems puzzled.) Am I ridiculous or what else is it? (VASSKA tries to begin, but the laugh chokes his words.) Good gracious! (Jumps up.) You frighten me.

Vasska (walks to the washstand, drinks water and begins to wash).—Elena, you would laugh too, if you had seen what I saw. (Roars, waving with his hands.) It was great. Oh, I'll tell you. (Laughs again.) Elena, I'll tell you, it was a tragic comedy. (ELENA walks up to VASSKA, apparently curious.) Oh, I shall never forget it. (Laughs more restrainedly.) Can you imagine a more interesting picture than a monk and a fool in — a fight? Balashoff and Father Feodosi pulled each other's hair, slapped, kicked, cursed, cried, and spat like two mad cats. (Laughs.)

Elena.—What was the matter with them?

Vasska (begins to dry his face with a towel).—The whole row was 'about Vera. Feodosi is so in love with her that he can't stand Balashoff's rivalry and teasing. Balashoff teased the old monk until he hit Balashoff with his holy picture, and then the war began.

Elena (taking some powder from the box on the trunk returns to her place).—When did that happen?

Vasska (combing his hair).—Just as I came in. That was the end of it. (Looks at the mirror.)

Elena.—Where are they now?



*Vasska*.—The prince is talking with the Father in the yard.

*Elena* (*fixes her hair and dress*).—Well, well, and Vanka is in love with Vera.

*Vasska* (*painting himself on the trunk*).—And the prince thinks without Vera the world is but a valley of tears. (*From the courtyard one sees ROSTOFF. VASSKA walks to the window, looks out, bows, and hints a smile.*) How do you do, prince? Where is the Father?

*Rostoff* (*comes to the window, playing a concertina*).—The Father is all right. He's writing a love letter, because, do you know, he has inherited a fortune from his uncle.

*Vasska* (*curiously*).—You don't say? So the old monk is serious about his romance.

*Rostoff* (*waving his hand*).—Gush! I don't think being rich makes a woman fall in love with a man, if she did not love him without the money. Do you think so?

*Vasska*.—Hard to tell. A woman's heart is like quicksilver. Happy the man who can catch it. (*ROSTOFF turns back and leaves.*)

*Elena* (*searching on the shelves*).—Vasska, did you see my music? (*VASSKA pulls it from a box and hands it to ELENA.*) Much obliged. (*After a short pause.*) The prince speaks so emphatically because he has the best chance with Vera. Do you think so?

*Vasska* (*begins to paint his face*).—Lord knows. You know that Vanka has considered Vera as his beloved for six months. He is awfully jealous of the prince. I think a scandal between the prince and Vanka will come up at any moment.

*Elena* (*takes the music and tries her voice. Rings for the servant, who enters, bowing. To the servant*).—Please call my accompanist. (*The servant goes.*)

*Vasska* (*arranging his costume walks to ELENA*).—Elena, I tell you we will have trouble about Vera. Much trouble, I tell you. (*Shakes his finger.*)

(*The pianist enters. ELENA gives the music. VASSKA fills a glass with tea, which he begins to drink with a sandwich.*)

(*ELENA sings 'The Mother Volga' and 'Ai Uchnem.' As the last song is finished the stage door opens, and having finished their repertoire VANKA and VERA enter from the stage. One hears the cheers and applause of the audience. VERA and VANKA, dancing, applaud ELENA.*)

*Vasska* (*preparing tea for VERA and VANKA*).—Will you give something for the da capo?

*Vera* (*dries her face with a towel and looks at herself in the hand mirror. ELENA and the pianist talking in a low voice about their program. Both bow to the others and leave for the stage; cheers and applause outside*).—We will give a folk-dance. That's what the people like best for the da capo.

*Vanka (nervously walking up and down, and looking out from the window. To VERA).—*Then you will again have the prince play?

*Vera (humorously).—*Why not? He is a good musician.

*Vasska (much amused about VERA and VANKA goes to the window).—*Prince Rostoff, Vera wishes you to play for her.

*(VANKA walks about nervously and looks irritated.)*

*Rostoff (enters with concertina and ungirds his saber, bows with a flirting look at VERA).—*What shall I play, Vera?

*Vera (with a smiling nod).—*Your folk-dance.

*(VANKA conversing nervously with VASSKA.)*

*(ROSTOFF nods to VERA, looks coldly at VANKA and plays. VERA and VANKA dancing. FEODOSI looks in from the one and BALASHOFF from the other open window. VASSKA hints mutely for both to enter, and giggles. BALASHOFF and FEODOSI make angry faces at each other, occasionally showing their fists. BALASHOFF jumps in.)*

*Vera (having finished the dancing).—*Mr. Balashoff, what's the matter with you? Your hair is disheveled and your face so frightened.

*(VASSKA bursts out laughing.)*

*Balashoff (makes a comic face and a mysterious gesture. Points at FEODOSI).—*Well, I gave that old monkey there a good licking.

*Feodosi (with angry face and doubling his fist).—*You gave me a licking? Not a bit. I thrashed you, you old fool.

*Balashoff (to VERA).—*Feodosi never will give his hand to a man like me. But now he's courting the janitor's maid. *(To the prince.)* Play something that fits for me and that old monk there to dance for the audience.

*Rostoff (bowing, with a humorous face).—*All right. *(Plays a folk-song.)*

*Balashoff (to FEODOSI).—*Now, come on. It's our turn to show what we can do. *(Dances around the trunk. FEODOSI, mad at him, spits vigorously.)*

*Vera (teasingly to FEODOSI).—*Don't take it too seriously, Father Feodosi. I am your friend. *(Reaches her hand. ROSTOFF lights a cigarette, VANKA discussing something lively with VASSKA. ELENA enters from the stage door. Wild applause and cheers outside.)*

*Elena (smiling and excited, puts her music down and walks to FEODOSI).—*Father, why don't you come in? Are you still mad at your friend Balashoff?

*Feodosi (grimly).—*Why does he *(points at BALASHOFF)* stick his nose in other people's affairs I would like to know?

*(Stage manager looks in and motions to continue.)*

*Vasska (rubs his hands nervously. To VANKA. VERA looks roguishly at the prince, then goes to ELENA and begins to converse in a low voice).—*Vanka, good gracious. You have to do it. I am responsible for it.



*(Final signal, the stage manager looking in very nervously.)*

*Balashoff.*— Well, “was ist los?”

*Vasska (still more irritated).*— Vanka refuses to dance with Vera. *(Prince turns aside.)* Now what shall I do? *(To VANKA.)* Please, Vanka, if you have a private affair with Vera settle it another time.

*Vanka (BALASHOFF teasing him with his mimicry).*— It’s up to Vera. She thinks I am her toy and plays with my sentiments as if they were strings of a musical instrument. If she does not give me her answer to-night whether she loves me or not, I am not going to stand it any longer.

*Vera (coldly, and looking amused).*— Vanka, what an absurd question in public? You can ask that privately.

*Balashoff (roars and walks around in a comic attitude).*— Poor Vanka. I really pity him. He knows the beauty of that private sentiment, that sacred thing, which we call love; and he must make it a prosaic trivial public affair. Why? Simply because Vera does not take the trouble to whisper that short word ‘yes.’ And now, now on that fatal ‘yes’ hangs this whole program, the scandal or success of the whole performance.

*(VANKA irritated, VASSKA looks helplessly at VERA and VANKA.)*

*Feodosi (from the open window, with an angry face).*— Vanka, kick the fool. Why should he make fun of sentiments and such sacred things?

*Rostoff (amused, waving with his hand to VERA).*— Vera, better take a little fresh air. *(Both exit from the side door.)*

*Vanka (looking angrily at the leaving couple).*— When we had not the prince in our company, Vera was a different girl — so different. I don’t blame Vera so much as I am mad at the prince, with his waxed mustache, title, and shiny uniform. He has turned her head. He needs a good lesson from me *(strikes the table)*; and I am going to tell him that his title and uniform are rot. If he does not leave Vera alone, by Jove, I’m going to thrash him.

*Balashoff (whistling and making comic faces. To VANKA).*— Vanka, don’t take it too seriously. Love is only a joke, because it’s a subject between smiling and sighing. When I kiss a woman, I always laugh — oh, it’s so good that you have to laugh about it.

*Vasska (irritated, walks to ELENA, then to VANKA, speaking in a low voice. FEODOSI disappears from the window. Aside).*— It’s an awful situation.

*Balashoff (pulls a bottle from a box, fills glasses with vodka).*— Friends, let’s swallow all the sacred and sentimental questions with a glass of vodka and go on with our program. The audience thinks we had some accident. Prosit! *(VASSKA and VANKA take the glasses, touch and empty.)*

*Vanka.*— Well, all right. It’s the last time I do this.



*Balashoff.*— I'll join you, Vanka. We will have lots of fun to-night.

*Rostoff (entering with VERA and FEODOSI).*— Now, how is it?

*Vasska (with a cheerful expression).*— Everything is so far all right. You can go ahead. (*Prince bows to VERA and all but FEODOSI and BALASHOFF leave from the stage door. BALASHOFF leaves by the courtyard, ELENA calls her accompanist, and FEODOSI reads a letter between the leaves of his prayer-book which he folds and puts back, pleased and rubbing his hands. The pianist enters and seated at the piano takes up the music. ELENA sings 'Oi za gaem' and 'Troika.' BALASHOFF enters, when the last song ends and applauds, walks to FEODOSI, who stares at him angrily.*)

*Feodosi.*— What do you want?

*Balashoff (fills a glass for FEODOSI and one for himself).*— Feodosi, let's be reconciled. I see and you can see also that we are both fools. Vera does not care for us. It's Prince Rostoff — you can feel it very plainly.

*Feodosi (takes the glass mechanically).*— Do you think so?

*Balashoff.*— Why, certainly. Do you think a fool and an old monk ever can get a chance? (*Waving his hand.*) Mistaken, brother.

*Father Feodosi (takes the glass, shakes his head).*— Well, you know, who does not love wife, wine, and song remains a fool all his life long.

*Balashoff.*— But if you had tasted the wine of Staten Island, and met the wife of my neighbor, Durland, and if you had heard her screechy singing, I'm sure you would change your tune. (*Signal. FEODOSI jumps up, puts his book on the trunk and leaves from the stage door.*)

*Balashoff (walks with curiosity to the trunk, takes FEODOSI's book, opens it and pulls out a letter).*— I am curious what that old convent owl kept so cautiously in his prayer-book. (*Reading the paper.*) A letter to Vera. Good Lord, what does he write her? (*Reads it.*)

'Much respected Vera: I have intended to express to you repeatedly that I love you and wish you to become my wife, but knowing that you would hardly consider my proposal, I did not venture to express to you my sacred sentiments' (*laughs aside*).

His sacred sentiments! Oh, Lord. (*Reads.*) 'Now that I have inherited all the estates of my late uncle, Vladimir Kudrin, who died suddenly, representing a value of five hundred thousand rubles, I hope that you may consider my proposal now and give your heavenly yes. I will have all ready for to-night. A carriage will await us at the gates. We will go to the church of St. Paul and there we will be declared man and wife. Oh, you heavenly rose, reply at once!'

(*Bursts out laughing.*) This is a fine love letter of the old celibat. Fine indeed (*walks pondering up and down*). But he has not signed it (*looks at the letter*). He probably forgot in his hurry. (*Ponders awhile.*)



I would better sign it with my name, put it in an envelope and let's see what joke comes of it. (*Hops for joy, and taking pen and ink, signs the letter, then taking an envelope, writes the address and closes it, leaving it on the table.*) Well (*rubbs his hands*), this is going to be a big joke. And it might turn out the biggest kind of luck for a fool. (*Puts the prayer-book back on the trunk, hums a trivial song while walking up and down. Suddenly he stops and puts his finger to his forehead.*) A great idea. I will do it. (*Looks at the trunk and lifts it, looking under it.*) By Jove, it's going to work out fine. (*Lifts the trunk and hides himself.*) It's fine. Ow, ow, ow! This is a great chamber of human secrets.

(*VERA, VANKA, and ROSTOFF enter from the stage. Audience cheers wildly. The dancers drink water. The cheers continue. All three exit from the same door to bow to the audience and return. VERA and ROSTOFF leave by the side door intimately talking. ELENA, with the pianist, leaves from the stage door. VANKA walks nervously up and down.*)

*Vanka* (*clenching his fists, stops*).—I cannot stand it any longer. (*Excited.*) No. I will make an end of this kind of pain. (*Gesturing vigorously.*) Either I get Vera or I leave this company. Yes, either one. (*ROSTOFF returns and turns to the fire. VANKA walks to him, and looks at him madly.*) You scoundrel, you must leave Vera alone. You have no business to mix yourself in my romance. Vera would love me if you were not here.

*Rostoff* (*drawing himself up proudly*).—Do you dare to tell me—me, a nobleman, an officer of the guard—that I am a scoundrel? What do you mean?

*Vanka* (*calmly and boldly*).—I mean what I have said.

*Rostoff* (*irritated, grasps the hilt of his saber*).—Do you mean? (*Looks at him furiously. VANKA nods.*) I challenge you to a duel. Do you hear, I challenge you to a duel.

*Vanka* (*nervously, stepping back*).—All right. I accept it. Where shall it take place and when?

*Rostoff*.—Right here. And I want it to be fought just now. (*Pulls out his pistol.*) Here is my pistol, and you can take one of the theater's pistols. Each of us has to fire six times.

*Vanka*.—But if we should fail to kill or wound each other?

*Rostoff*.—Then we have to leave Vera alone, and no one of us has the right to make court to her. (*Examines his pistol.*) It's all right. I lay my pistol on the table.

*Vanka* (*turns to the shelf whence he pulls down a pistol, and examines it*).—The pistol seems to be all right. (*His hands tremble.*) A duel, a duel!

*Rostoff* (*walks to the window, with a slightly excited voice*).—But we have

to take our seconds, before the ladies return. (*Calls out from window.*) Vasska, Feodosi, and Balashoff! Hallo!

*Vasska's voice outside.*—Hallo! What is it?

(*ROSTOFF jumps out from the window, VANKA puts his pistol on the table.*)

*Vanka.*—Oh, I don't care! If I am shot or not, it's just the same. (*Leaves by the side door.*)

*Balashoff (under the trunk).*—Well, well, thus they are going to make a duel, because of Vera. But I'll fix them, all right. It's going to be a big fuss. (*Leaps out from the trunk with upturned sleeves, looks suspiciously around.*) Now the next thing to do is— (*puts finger on his forehead as if pondering.*) Yes, I'll exchange the full cartridges for empty ones. (*Searching on the shelves. Finds a box with empty cartridges.*) They can shoot as many empty ones as they please. (*Unloads and loads both pistols and throws away the full cartridges.*) Now if this will not fix Vanka and the prince, I don't know. According to their word of honor they will have to leave Vera alone. Maybe I can have a chance, after all? (*Makes a comic face, jumps amused around the trunk and then hides himself as before.*)

*Feodosi (enters shyly, looks curiously at the pistols, goes to the holy picture, crosses himself and makes a prayer).*—Oh, good Lord, thou great wonderworker! Urge our pretty, fascinating Vera so that she will become my wife, now and forever. Amen.

(*BALASHOFF barks from the trunk with a strange voice.*)

*Feodosi (looks frightened around).*—Hospodi pommilui! It must have been the old devil itself. (*Investigates under the couches, looks out of the window and shudders.*) I am not afraid of the devil and never was. (*Shudders and walks to the holy picture. Nervously.*) It's the devil, no doubt. It's opposed to my love of Vera.

(*ROSTOFF, VASSKA, and VANKA enter. FATHER looks surprised at them.*)

*Vasska (to ROSTOFF and VANKA).*—Gentlemen, can you really not settle the question in any other way?

*Rostoff and Vanka.*—No. Impossible.

*Feodosi.*—What's the matter with you?

*Rostoff (to FEODOSI).*—Father Feodosi, you must act as my second. I and Vanka are going to fight a duel right away. I could not find Balashoff.

*Feodosi (groaning and pale).*—A duel? Oh, I—I hate to be. I am afraid. (*Waves with hands.*) It's terrible to see a duel. But if you insist—oh, heavens! I am very much afraid. (*Shudders.*)

*Vasska (to FEODOSI).*—Shut up, Father. It's not so bad as you think. You stand over there, I stand here, and that's all there is to it.



*Feodosi (trembling and pale).*— But say, if the bullet should hit me? *Hospodi pommilui! (Takes tremblingly his stand.)*

*(ROSTOFF and VANKA take pistols and take their stands.)*

*Vasska (to ROSTOFF and VANKA).*— Are you ready, gentlemen? *(Both nod mutely.)*

*(FEODOSI extremely nervous and looks around as if to run away.)*

*Vasska (walks to his place seriously).*— One, two, three.

*(ROSTOFF and VANKA fire. FEODOSI is frightened and gets out by the window. VASSKA continues counting, and both fire all the cartridges.)*

*Rostoff (throwing his pistol disgustedly on the floor).*— This confounded duel is the first in my life when I failed to hit my opponent. Damn! *(Turns aside.)*

*Vanka (puts his pistol on the table, sadly).*— This means, Vera, good by forever.

*(VASSKA goes to ROSTOFF and VANKA, congratulating both.)*

*Rostoff (gives his hand to VANKA, reconciled. VANKA takes the hand and murmurs something).*— But where is my second?

*Vasska (amused, points at the window).*— You ought to have seen him running out. It was a real comedy. *(Takes a bottle, fills the glasses.)*

*(ELENA and VERA enter, the former from the stage door, the latter from the court, smell the smoke, look amazed around. VASSKA, VANKA, and ROSTOFF standing around the trunk with glasses in their hands.)*

*Elena.*— Why is the smoke of gunpowder here, and why are you all so strange and excited?

*Vasska (pursing up his lips).*— Oh, we just had a rehearsal of the shooting.

*Vera (puzzled about ROSTOFF and VANKA, who stand coldly ignoring her).*— Prince, won't you treat me to a glass of wine?

*Rostoff (fills the glass, passes to her coldly, and returns. ELENA looks at him amazed).*— Elena, why do you look at me so penetratingly?

*Elena (humorously).*— Because you are so different, so unusual. What's the matter with you? And Vanka is somehow strange.

*Rostoff (throws up his hands).*— Isn't it strange for you to ask me? I am just as I have been always.

*Vera (jumps up and goes to the table).*— I don't like this atmosphere. *(Makes herself busy.)* Elena, let's make punch. You fix the sandwiches, I'm going to make the tea and the drinks. *(Both get busy.)*

*Feodosi (appears on the open window, looks on with a frightened face. VASSKA, VANKA, and ROSTOFF smile).*— Is everybody all right?

*Vera (looks amazed at FEODOSI).*— Well, what do you mean?

*Vasska (evasively).*—Feodosi probably saw a vision. (*To FEODOSI.*) You see that we are all right, don't you?

(*ROSTOFF takes his concertina and goes playing to the fireplace.*)

*Elena (while setting the table).*—Father Feodosi, what's the matter with you? You certainly look to-day so out of place.

*Feodosi (climbs in, scratching his beard).*—Ugh! this wicked world. (*Waves with hand.*) It does not give me a chance. A woman likes to kneel always before a faked thing and never knows the real man who would make her happy. She likes to be fooled. (*Seated on a taburet.*)

*Vera.*—How is that?

*Elena.*—The Father looks as if he were in love. (*FEODOSI turns bashfully aside and waves with his hand as if to say, don't speak of it. All laugh.*)

*Vasska.*—It's human. It's all right with the Father. He gets tired of that eternal preaching of the spirit and wants also to live the life of the body.

*Vera (commandingly).*—Father Feodosi, you'd better help me to fix the supper. We had a fine audience to-night, didn't we? I saw a fashionable, pretty woman in the second row, who did not turn away her eyes from our men. It's probably the Father at whom she was looking.

*Feodosi (rising clumsily).*—Pah, don't tease me, Vera. (*Walks to the table.*) Now what do you want me to do?

*Elena (passing the big earthen vessel).*—You fill this with boiling water from the samovar and put the frankforters in. Vasska will open the caviar jar.

(*VANKA and ROSTOFF conversing, facing the fire.*)

*Vasska.*—I wonder where is Balashoff? Feodosi ought to know him.

*Feodosi (fills the earthen vessel and puts it on the trunk).*—The dog take the fool! I am sick of him. (*At this moment the dish with frankforters, overheated, boils over on the trunk, and FEODOSI starts back frightened. VASSKA, ELENA, and VERA look up astonished.*) Good heaven, what an accident! What a misfortune!

*Vasska.*—It's luck, it's luck. Never mind, Feodosi! (*Suddenly the trunk begins to shake and everybody looks at it wondering. FEODOSI throwing up his hands.*)

*Balashoff (from the trunk, with a deep voice).*—Au, au, au!

*Father.*—It must be the devil!

*Balashoff (from the trunk).*—I'll show you the devil—you confounded! Au, au. You've scalded my hair off. Damn. I'm not joking. (*The trunk is turned over and BALASHOFF leaps out, hot water dropping from his hair. All amazed.*)

*Vera (frightened, staggering back).*—Balashoff! Heaven! How did it happen?



*Rostoff and Vanka (jumping up).*—Well, what's this? (*To BALASHOFF.*) Balashoff, how did it happen?

*Balashoff (puts his fist into FEODOSI's face).*—I'll pay you for this joke, you dog, you monkey.

*Feodosi (trembling).*—Balashoff, don't be a fool. I didn't do it intentionally. By Jove, I didn't do it to hurt you.

*(All burst out laughing.)*

*Balashoff (seriously and angrily).*—Damn you! Certainly you did it. How do you dare to deny it!

*(BALASHOFF slaps FEODOSI, who strikes back. VASSKA interferes. FEODOSI escapes, everybody excited. ROSTOFF begins to play the concertina.)*

*Vera.*—Well, gentlemen, better come to the table and let's forget the trouble. Vanka, call back Feodosi, he did not do it intentionally.

*Balashoff (wipes his face).*—This was no joke. Think of it, boiling water poured on your head and all your body boiling with steam.

*Vanka (calls out of the window).*—Feodosi, eh, Father, don't take it too seriously. It's all right with Balashoff. He's not quite boiled.

*Balashoff.*—But boiled enough for the beef trust.

*(ELENA, VERA, VANKA, and ROSTOFF seated at the table. Begin to drink the tea.)*

*Vasska (takes a letter from the other table, reading it).*—Oh, Vera, this is for you!

*Vera (startled).*—A letter for me? Who brought it?

*Vasska.*—I didn't see it brought. *(Everybody shakes his head denyingly.)* A strange handwriting. I don't know it.

*Vera (unfolds and reads it. BALASHOFF nervous. VERA, bashful, reads it again. All look secretly at her. Rises and walks to BALASHOFF, reaching her hand).*—Mr. Balashoff, I am happy to accept your proposal.

*Prince and Vanka.*—What?

*Balashoff.*—Vera, do you mean it seriously? *(Looks at her.)*

*Vera (blushes).*—I would not joke in such a matter. I mean what I have said.

*Balashoff (confused and excited).*—Vera, my dear, sweet Vera. Oh, how I love you! *(Embracing and kissing each other.)*

*Vera (affectionately).*—Balashoff, you make me happy. *(Embracing.)* Oh, you, my dear beloved!

*Vasska (staggering back in surprise. Everybody amazed).*—Vera, Balashoff! What is it?

*Vera (to BALASHOFF, with an affectionate look).*—Shall I tell the secret?

*Balashoff.*—Sure.

*Vera (breathing heavily and nervous).—* I — (*blushes*) I am the bride of Balashoff. We will be married to-night in the church of St. Paul.

*Balashoff.*— And you, comrades, shall be our guests and wedding witnesses.

*Elena (jumps up, rushes to VERA. ROSTOFF and VANKA as if paralyzed).—* Vera, my dear. I congratulate you.

*Vasska (walks to BALASHOFF).—* Well, well. This news came unexpectedly, didn't it? (*Reaches BALASHOFF his hand.*) My best wishes!

(*ROSTOFF and VANKA look dazed. All excited.*)

*Balashoff.*— We ought to have big fun for our wedding.

*Vasska (lifting his hand).—* But, Vera and Balashoff, let me say a word. Would it not be far better if we perform the marriage ceremony right here? (*To ELENA.*) Don't you think so?

*Elena.*— Certainly. That's much more romantic.

*Vera.*— But who is going to marry us here?

*Vasska (gesturing).—* Oh, Father Feodosi. He'll do it. He's the monk of our company, why shouldn't he do it?

*Balashoff (gasping).—* Father Feodosi? Oh, no. I don't think he'll do it and I'm afraid — strange — (*pondering*).

*Elena.*— Oh, we shall insist that he does it.

*Vasska (taking from the shelf the wedding crowns).—* We have the wedding crowns here. We have plenty of wax candles here and everything necessary for such a ceremony. I'll be one of the best men, the prince or Vanka will be the other. (*Looks inquiringly at VERA, then at BALASHOFF.*)

*Vera.*— All right. I have nothing against it. (*BALASHOFF nods. ELENA whispers something in VERA's ear. ROSTOFF and VANKA as if bursting with pain. VASSKA takes the candles and lights from the table to the trunk.*)

*Balashoff (mysteriously aside).—* By Jove, if this scheme works out as it seems, it will be one of the biggest jokes I ever made.

*Feodosi (looks in from the window).—* Well, what's going on here? Everybody is so festal and serious.

*Vasska (motioning and gesturing).—* Feodosi, come in quick. We have big news to tell you. Vera and Balashoff are to be married to-night and we want you to perform the marriage ceremony.

*Feodosi (waving his hand).—* I don't like to make fun of a sacred ceremony.

*Vasska.*— It's not fun. It is fact.

*Vanka (is getting more lively. ELENA is making a wreath, and VERA a veil).—* We will have to make the trunk serve as the altar. (*Wipes and covers it.*)

*Balashoff.*— Fine. The trunk is the very thing. (*Strikes it with his*



hand.) It's the trunk that opened to me the doors of this heavenly luck, it's the trunk that gave me the keys to Vera's heart. Long live the trunk! (*It looks festal with the crowns and the lighted candles on it.*)

Feodosi (*climbing in and shaking his head*).— I can't believe that it is serious.

Rostoff (*walking nervously up and down*).— Well, you see it is. And they want you to fix up the ceremonial end.

Feodosi (*groaning*).— No, oh, no! Oh, I can't do it and I will not do it. No, sir, never.

(VASSKA and VERA try to persuade FEODOSI, and all are talking lively in a low voice and gesturing.)

Rostoff (to ELENA).— What do you think of this?

Elena (*finishing the wreath and shrugging her shoulders*).— It's very interesting. But say, did you or Vanka offend Vera so deeply that she suggested to Balashoff to make the proposal?

Rostoff.— No. But there is some mystery behind it. I can't believe that Vera deliberately will become the wife of a fool, a third-rate comedian. Can you? (ELENA shakes her head.)

Vasska.— Now, comrades, Father Feodosi consented to do his duty, briefly and strongly.

(ELENA and BALASHOFF applaud. Groom and bride walk out to the altar. FEODOSI walks to the trunk and takes his prayer-book. Nervous. BALASHOFF and VERA follow. VASSKA keeps the crown on the head of VERA; PRINCE, of BALASHOFF. The bride, the groom, and the best men have lighted candles in their hands.)

Vasska (*suppressing his laughter, seeing that FATHER FEODOSI hesitates to begin*).— Go ahead, Father. What's the matter with you?

Feodosi (*wipes his beard and sighs. His voice trembles*).— Balashoff, my son, hast thou resolved to become the husband of this Vera? then say yes.

Balashoff.— Yes, yes, yes.

Feodosi (to VERA).— Vera, my daughter (*the emotion chokes his words*), hast thou—(*overcome by emotion*). Oh, no (*protestingly*), I—I certainly cannot continue. (*Staggers nervously to a couch.*)

Vasska.— Father Feodosi, don't make a fuss over your emotions. Go ahead.

Elena.— Feodosi, really, do your duty.

Feodosi (*groaning and grasping his head*).— Heaven forgive me, I cannot marry her, because I love her.

(ROSTOFF and VANKA giggling.)

Vasska (*stepping to the front*).— Good gracious! we can't leave a couple unmarried, when half of the ceremony is already performed.

*Balashoff (disappointedly).*—Vasska, you fix the end of it. We can't stand here like fools.

*Feodosi (covers his face with both hands).*—Oh, how I loved Vera, how I dreamed of her day and night — and now another man comes and snaps her away from between my fingers! Oh, oh! this wicked world!

*Rostoff.*—Hush, Father. You are not the only victim. Better keep your mouth closed.

*Vasska.*—Vanka, come and be the best man and I'll perform the rest of the ceremony. It's all right when Feodosi fixed the first part of it. (*VANKA takes the crown.*)

*Feodosi.*—No, it isn't.

*Balashoff (excitedly).*—Yes, it is. You did it over half. Anybody can fix the other.

*Feodosi.*—No, it isn't.

*Vasska (to VERA).*—Vera, my daughter, art thou willing to become the wife of Balashoff? then say yes.

*Vera.*—Yes.

*Vasska.*—I declare you man and wife, now and forever. Amen.

*Feodosi (excitedly, rises).*—I protest against this faked marriage. It's a fake. (*All congratulate VERA and BALASHOFF. ROSTOFF begins to play the concertina.*)

*Balashoff.*—Feodosi, now you keep your mouth closed, or you'll still get your last licking from me.

*Feodosi (grasps his prayer-book and searches between its sheets nervously for his letter. To VERA).*—Vera, did you take my letter from this book?

*Vera.*—What letter? No. I didn't see your letter.

*Feodosi (nervously).*—I had a letter in this book in which I wrote to you that I had inherited the estates of my uncle, and made you the proposal. You know what I mean? (*All look amazed at the Father.*)

*Vera.*—What nonsense you are talking. I got a letter from Balashoff, my husband, and it was he who inherited the estates of his uncle. (*Pulls the letter and scanning its contents.*) Surely, it's his letter.

*Feodosi (staggering back, reaches for the letter).*—How his letter? He has no uncle of such wealth. Heaven knows if he has an uncle at all. (*Reads and throws up his hands.*) Oh, what a swindle!

*Vera.*—It's Balashoff's letter. (*To BALASHOFF.*) Isn't it so?

*Feodosi (trembling with excitement).*—This is impudence, the most awful crime ever committed. I wrote this letter and left it unsigned between my prayer-book. Now that fool has signed it and addressed to Vera. (*Looks angrily at BALASHOFF and rubs his hands.*)

*Balashoff.*—Well, yes. I signed it and that's all there is to it. Vera



married me not because of my inheritance of an uncle's estates, but because she loved me. Isn't that so, Vera?

*(Everybody excited and amused.)*

*Vera (turns nervously aside and looks angrily at BALASHOFF).*— So, Balashoff, you haven't inherited anything?

*Balashoff.*— Not a kopec. And we don't need it. You know the people who marry for money never are happy and money never brings happiness.

*Vera.*— So you lied?

*Balashoff.*— In order to make you happy.

*Vasska (to VANKA and ROSTOFF).*— And Feodosi did not inherit anything. To cheer him up for to-night's performance I fooled him that his rich uncle had died and had left him his estate.

*Balashoff (to VERA).*— Now, Vera, did you hear what Vasska said? Did you?

*Vera (more consoled).*— Is that true? Oh, I would rather have Balashoff than a monk.

*Balashoff.*— And, Vera, did you not like my kiss? Say to-morrow if you regret what you did?

*Vera (bursts out laughing and suddenly embraces BALASHOFF).*— It's all right. What is shall remain. It's all fate.

*Everybody.*— Bravo! Long live the newly married!

*(FEODOSI takes up his garment and walks, beating time, around the trunk. All join him singing in chorus and playing the wedding march. ELENA as soloist.)*

CURTAIN

# THE CIVIC THEATER

BY JAMES PLATT WHITE

**T**HIS is a difficult time for one to speak of the organization of a theater who wishes to follow as far as possible the high vision of theatrical beauty which has shone out to inspire our generation, but who does not see that that vision will in any way be served by refusing to face existing facts. Now the indubitable fact about the theater to-day that cannot with any justice be ignored is that, after the great period of theatrical advance which one may say roughly ran from 1881 to 1906 or 1907, we are living throughout the world in a time of theatrical reaction when the public is more and more turning from high dramatic art to facile amusement. It seems at times as if there were something fatal to the comprehension of dramatic beauty in the atmosphere of those very large cities in which the life of the world is rapidly centering. Amidst the turmoil of existence in such cities it seems to be difficult for every type of the population that comprises them to gain the calm and the poise that are necessary before one can attain the perception of beauty. Among the rich too many are absorbed in the enjoyment of those material things which inevitably lie open to them, not seeing that wealth is of value only when it is made the great instrument that it can be made toward the attainment of culture. Among those of moderate means, the economic middle class, too many are driven, in their effort to meet the constantly increasing competition and the steadily mounting cost of living, into a mad pursuit of the means with which 'to keep up appearances' that numbs them for any mental life outside of their vocation, not seeing that no appearances are worth keeping up which involve the sacrifice of the life of the spirit and the life of the mind. Our economic organization, finally, so regulates the hours of the mechanics and laborers that they are so absorbed in gaining, not the substance with which to keep up appearances, but a bare livelihood, that they have no energy for anything that lies outside of their daily drudgery. And the only element that can be relied upon for the support of beauty is a remnant in all these classes who, often at a heavy sacrifice, have preserved their detachment and their freedom.

These conditions have long been apparent in the two largest cities of the world; they have within the last few years steadily been becoming more and more apparent, also, in that third largest city which in the life of the mind is incomparably the first and which, until very recently, had



succeeded in joining to the energy of a large city the repose of a small. The recent condition in Berlin, and indeed in every large city, was perfectly expressed last month by the great Berlinesic critic, Alfred Kerr. Dr. Kerr spoke of 'this recent theatrical Berlin of running to seed, of claptrap, of distraction from the essential, of stupefying charm and the traffic in light wares, of operetta, of mediocrity that wins prizes, of attractions, of the truly metropolitan First-Class-First-Class Decadence.'

Apparent as had been this running to seed in Berlin after the attainment of the highest theatrical culture which the modern world has known, I retained faith in the ability of the sagacious men who stood at the head of the two Berlinesic theaters of Art to surmount the difficulties. Then this autumn came, first the rumor, and finally, after some weeks during which one could still entertain hope, the announcement, that Dr. Otto Brahm, the manager of the Lessing-Theater, would give up the management of his theater in the summer of 1914,—an announcement that caused me the blackest hour of my theatrical life. Now that Professor Max Reinhardt is bringing 'Sumurun' to America, we are constantly told that 'he is the Colossus that bestrides the modern German stage.' I cannot state too emphatically, therefore, that he is nothing of the sort, though he is a great, if unequal, artist. Otto Brahm is too shy and simple a little man for it to be in the least appropriate to speak of him as a Colossus that bestrides the German stage or anything else, but the fact remains that for the greatest personality of the modern German theater, who has raised theatrical art to an elevation it has never before attained, one must go, not to Max Reinhardt but 'ein Haus weiter,' not to the Deutsches Theater on the Schumann-Strasse but to the Lessing-Theater two blocks away on the Friedrich-Karl-Ufer. There is no doubt, moreover, that Otto Brahm is being driven from his position by the difficulty of maintaining his theater. The German public has not been keeping pace with Gerhart Hauptmann and Schnitzler in their latest innovations in playwriting. It has been constantly harder to find more theatrical plays of the higher type,—plays on which, as I shall show later in this address, the maintenance of Brahm's management has largely been based. The shameful neglect of the Lessing-Theater by the public between 1906 and 1908 has obviously not been wiped out, as I had hoped, by a series of good popular successes leading up to the two popular triumphs of Bahr's 'Concert' and Schönherr's 'Faith and Fatherland.' And in this withdrawal there is not the least thing shameful, not the least thing to blot the crystalline purity of that shining white soul. Otto Brahm will be nearly sixty at the time of his retirement, and he will have fought a great fight greatly for twenty-five years. He may well feel that he will have earned the right to stack his arms, and, at an acute and dif-

ficult crisis, to leave the fight to be taken up by younger men. And to what I am sure will be his noble rest after his noble struggle he will bear the loving and undiminished reverence of those of us who owe to him a comprehension of the very nature of theatrical Art, and, modest as he is, I hope, the realization which all his disciples possess that he has set his name right beside the names of Henrik Ibsen and Gerhart Hauptmann in the annals of the theater forever.

Yet, when I realized that the master of the modern theater was to be driven from the theater in the theatrical capital of the world, I began to feel as if the base had been removed from beneath my entire system of theatrical thought: from beneath the belief that it was possible to conduct an unsubsidized private theater of Art, since, as I have said in a book on 'The Art of the Theater-Manager,' which I have been writing for some years,

... 'there seems no reason . . . why a management should not be quite "practical" which should draw its profits from artistic plays which the public would support, and should partly use those profits for the production of plays to which the public had not yet risen.'

Less than a fortnight had passed before the reassuring news came to me that the battle was not yet lost, and that what Alfred Kerr has called 'the great task of twenty great years' had not been definitely undone. The Brahm company issued the statement that it had arranged to continue even after 1914 as an organization which, in the words of its own announcement, an announcement indeed worthy of being issued by a company which includes Oscar Sauer, Else Lehmann, Irene Triesch, Emanuel Reicher, and Hans Marr, 'shall ensure, expand, and develop what Brahm has gained for Art.' Financial support had been secured, it was stated, which assured the maintenance of the organization, and Herr Willy Grunwald, a former member of the company, had been elected as future manager. Herr Grunwald's bold and skillful Jörgen Tesman never sentimentalized for a second into a nineteenth-century Vicar of Wakefield, but consistently sustained in that tragi-comic tone in which Ibsen set the character; his noble Stephan von Menzingen in Gerhart Hauptmann's 'Florian Geyer,' who, though a minor figure silent in the background, by the high pathos with which, amidst looming disaster, he listened to the song recounting Geyer's former triumphs, dimmed for me, though he never obtruded himself for a second, the elemental grief of Rudolf Rittner's Florian Geyer sobbing in the foreground; these impersonations of Herr Grunwald's in the grand style form a sufficient guarantee that he will do everything that inspiration and courage and talent can do to fill the irreparable void which Otto Brahm's passing from the theater will leave.



My wishes and hopes for the success of this enterprise cannot blind me, however, to the fact that the possibility of the maintenance of private unsubsidized theaters of a high class is now doubtful.

The possibility of the establishment of a high theater in America seems to me, however, to lie precisely in the possibility of the maintenance of a private unsubsidized theater of rank.

Quite frankly, I do not believe that the establishment of an American theater aided by a city, a state, or the nation, is, at present, in the least feasible, or that, even if it should ultimately prove feasible, it would be in the least desirable. I feel that such a theater would inevitably lie in the hands of the politicians. They would probably add it as another link to their precious spoil system; they would almost certainly impose upon it their own artistic taste, and as I see no reason to assume that their taste is any better in regard to plays than in regard to statues, such a consummation would scarcely conduce to the establishment of a theater of high rank. Even in a theater not subsidized by a municipality have we not seen the Mayor of Boston this autumn imposing the changing of the Mayor in 'Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford' to a mere, harmless Colonel? In a subsidized theater probably the colonels in their turn and every other class of office holders would force the taboo of any satire or unfavorable portrayal of their offices. With the politicians' dread of alienating any large 'vote,' one may be sure, moreover, that this taboo would quickly be spread to every satire or frank portrayal of a nationality. Does any one believe for a moment, for example, that the Irish population of Boston would ever permit the performance in a theater subsidized by the city of Boston of one of Synge's plays of modern life with the possible exception of 'Riders to the Sea'? And with the national taboos which the Irish seem to be commencing, I see no reason why the Germans should not object to the portrayal of Berlinesse life in Gerhart Hauptmann's 'Rats,' the French to the portrayal of French womanhood in Becque's 'Lady of Paris,' and so on to the end of the nationalities. Now it is quite impossible to accept to-day a theater which would be kept from playing Synge or Gerhart Hauptmann or Becque or any other dramatist that it saw fit. Mlle. Barney was well inspired when she suggested the title of 'Théâtre Libre' for the theater whence the entire modern theater was to spring. Freedom is the great breath which has swept through and regenerated the modern theater, and we have fortunately progressed far since the time when Shakespeare and Molière flattered in their plays Queen Elizabeth and Louis XIV. This demand for an unchecked freedom of thought and of speech has so spread throughout our theatrical life that the demand has best been expressed, so far as I know, not by a member of the Naturalistic School, which gave the

idea its birth, but by a great Romanticist, Mr. W. B. Yeats, in an address delivered at one of the performances given by The Irish National Theater Society before the British Association. After speaking of the free investigation that was the obligation and the privilege of the man of science, Mr. Yeats went on to add that

‘We, on the other hand, are Adams of a different Eden, a more terrible Eden, perhaps, for we must name and number the passions and motives of men. There, too, everything must be known, everything understood, everything expressed; there, also, there is nothing common, nothing unclean, every motive must be followed through all the obscure mystery of its logic. Mankind must be seen and understood in every possible circumstance, in every conceivable situation. There is no laughter too bitter, no irony too harsh for utterance, no passion too terrible to be set before the minds of men. The Greeks knew that. Only in this way can mankind be understood, only when we have put ourselves in all the possible positions of life, from the most miserable to those that are so lofty that we can only speak of them in symbols and in mysteries, will entire wisdom be possible. All wise government depends upon this knowledge not less than upon that other knowledge which is your business rather than ours; and we and you alike rejoice in battle, finding the sweetest of all music to be the stroke of the sword.’

A privately subsidized theater is, indeed, until we shall at last have created a state sufficiently civilized to maintain a high national theater, the ideal form of organization, provided that the subsidizers will be people who act from a true love of dramatic beauty and not merely from a casual sense that the endowment of a theater is much akin to the subscription for an opera box and the maintenance of a yacht. The Artistic Theater of Moscow stands as the high model of what a theater may be made by the ardent and disinterested devotion during more than ten years of a group of people of wealth. The Artistic Theater has simply unlimited resources, and it is in no way checked by the taste of its supporters since they are all civilized people. On account of these resources it has been able to maintain the ideal system of repertory at a time when the theaters with large expenses which they have been obliged to meet from their own earnings, even in the case of the theaters of high rank, have been driven to long runs. The Artistic Theater has been able, furthermore, to ignore the merely pretty plays of which the repertory of theaters with large expenses and dependent on their own profits must partly be comprised, and to devote itself entirely to plays of beauty. The Artistic Theater, again, can give precisely the plays it wishes at the time it wishes. It was able, for example, to carry steadily in its repertory Gerhart Hauptmann’s most sublime play, ‘Michael Kramer,’ the play in which the essential inspiration of Hauptmann calls out to us most clearly, while Otto Brahm, the manager of the Hauptmann theater of the world, was obliged, after the play’s popular failure at its



first production, to drop it from the bill, dependent as he is on his own earnings, and did not dare to revive it for nearly ten years.

If The American Drama Society can secure for a theater in Boston a group of donors with taste and inspiration, it will, indeed, have deserved well of the drama. The recent fiasco of The New Theater of New York suggests vividly, however, what is likely to happen when the donors are largely not donors of the right kind. If the subsidizers of a theater desire trivial amusement slightly veiled with the decorousness of Art or interfere with the production of plays injurious to the vested interests from which their wealth is derived, that theater, clearly, offers no more opportunity than a theater publicly endowed for the free theater we demand.

Even in Boston, unfortunately, it scarcely seems reasonable to count too much on the establishment of a theater which shall be privately subsidized and at the same time capable of responding to the modern spirit.

A private theater dependent on its own resources, or at best supported by so slight a subscription that the theater can by no means be called subsidized, seems to me, therefore, the only theater of a high class in America of which we can hold any definite anticipation.

Experience in Europe for seventeen years, or since Otto Brahm opened his regular management at the Deutsches Theater in the autumn of 1894, had seemed to show that it was quite reasonable to count on the possibility, in spite of the indubitable difficulties of the task, of the establishment of an unsubsidized private theater of Art. European experience no longer seems so conclusive. If this experience is still inconclusive in one way, however, it is also inconclusive in the other. And the fact remains that this little group of European managers were able to maintain their theaters at such an elevation that in Berlin, the center of the movement, Alfred Kerr has called the title, 'Artistic Theater,' a pleonasm. An American critic would be more apt, would he not, to call this title a contradiction?

Even at this crisis, therefore, it still remains valuable to consider by what means these managers were able to carry on their theaters.

The vulgarity of the American stage has led to such a misapprehension of the function of the theater-manager that I feel that I must first emphasize the view of their function held by the managers belonging to this little group. So intelligent a critic as Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton states the need of 'oh! above all, that perhaps not impossible He, the bold manager.' The following statements made by André Antoine in 1890, when he was first trying to turn his independent theater into a regular theater, would seem to indicate the actual existence of a bold manager. At the beginning of the pamphlet which he issued to explain the proposed change to his

subscribers, a pamphlet which is one of the masterpieces of theatrical literature, M. Antoine said:

'Let it be distinctly understood once for all so that we need not return to the subject, that it is not a question of floating a business.

'That, in short, the Théâtre Libre, in its new form, will remain as in the past, an institution devoted to the public service and unversed in the sordid "deals" in which bit by bit the "theatrical business" is being submerged.'

And at the close of the pamphlet he added:

'We are going to undertake something that we believe to be for the public service: a model theater which will live on and for French literature.'

When I think, in fact, of the way in which Antoine and his great colleagues have for nearly twenty years maintained theaters that were truly 'institutions for the public service,' I feel that Mr. Eaton might with quite as much justice speak, after Henrik Ibsen and Gerhart Hauptmann, of the need of 'that perhaps not impossible He, the bold' dramatist.

Now how have the managers of this little group been able to conduct their 'institutions for the public service,' all of which, with the exception of the Irish National Theater Society and the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, have been theaters subject to large expenses, and of which the Odéon since Antoine assumed the management has been the only theater aided to any extent by a government, and the Artistic Theater the only one so aided privately: how, in particular, have the two great private Berlinesse theaters been maintained which have placed Berlin in its incomparable theatrical position?

Brahm and Reinhardt have realized perfectly, in the first place, that it is the duty of an artist in theater-management placed at the head of an unsubsidized theater with large expenses to join caution to courage, and to be shrewd as well as elevated. Such managers cannot and must not lose hold of their public. They must often have that highest form of courage which consists in not doing the elevated thing one longs to do so that ultimately the elevated thing may be done all the more effectively. Brahm wrote in 1886, for example, of 'the noble duty' of a theater-manager to give a cycular performance of Ibsen's plays of modern life in prose; though his life has been devoted to Ibsen, and though he became manager of a regular theater in 1894, he did not announce the preparation of such a cycle until 1906, or commence its production until 1909. As a reward, he had by 1909 so trained his public for Ibsen that in the two years between January, 1909, and January, 1911, he was able to give six series of the cycle in Berlin and one in Vienna.



Brahm and Reinhardt, in the second place, have persistently set beside the austerer dramas other plays of types more easily comprehensible to the general public.

Brahm, from his assumption of regular management in 1894, among the modern plays to which ever increasingly his theater has been given over, in addition to the stern dramas of Ibsen, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Schnitzler, in the production of which has lain the real life of his theater, has consistently sought out plays of a more conventional type which still give to the theater what is the theater's, and in which the general public can find the external excitement dear they cherish. From 1894 to 1907 Brahm largely maintained his theater by means of the plays of Hermann Sudermann and Ludwig Fulda, aided by an occasional play of the same type by some other German writer, and occasional importations like 'Cyrano de Bergerac' and 'Monna Vanna.' It was largely through the proceeds from such plays that he was able to complete the conquest of the German stage for Ibsen and to give support to Gerhart Hauptmann and Schnitzler. When the Berlinesse critics under Kerr's lead had so shattered Sudermann's and Fulda's positions with the public that the plays of the two leading German playwrights, in contradistinction to dramatists, had ceased to be attractive for the audiences of the Lessing-Theater, these critics had incidentally shattered the very policy on which Brahm's entire management of a regular theater had been built. From 1907 to 1909 he tried to follow up this same policy by searching for new writers of theatric plays, by reviving an old farce, 'The Rape of the Sabine Women,' which Augustin Daly adapted as 'A Night Out,' and by importing a French farce, 'The King,' by Flers and Caillavait; in his confusion he was even driven to 'The Devil,' though Berlin, be it said to its credit, would not support that inept and vulgar play for more than seventeen performances. And Brahm did not begin to re-establish his theater on a firm basis until, commencing in the autumn of 1909, he again secured a series of theatric plays by Hardt, Bahr, and Schönherr, which satisfy the popular taste of this moment in Berlin, and yet never rise above it as do the plays which have been the important productions artistically of these last seasons, Gerhart Hauptmann's 'Griselda' and 'Rats,' and Schnitzler's 'Broad Land.'

The principal example of Brahm's cultivation of the theatric play is his production of Hartleben's 'Carnival,' which had one hundred and nineteen performances during its first season of 1900-1901, and which, after more than eleven years and when approaching its three hundredth performance, is still merrily continuing on its course as one of the most frequent Sunday afternoon and an occasional evening performance. Brahm has made his production of 'Carnival,' moreover, what 'Carnival' itself

is not; a great work of art, the most delightful theatrical performance which I have ever seen.

When two of Max Reinhardt's principal stage managers, Felix Holländer and Arthur Kahane, state in their preface to the organ of Reinhardt's theater, *'Blätter des Deutschen Theaters,'* as 'the result of a long experience,' that 'the theater belongs to the theater,' and that they 'have always tried to give it back to itself,' it is only natural that the path of this great lyric poet of the modern stage is strewn from the very outset of his management with productions that are in substance much like the productions of the conventional stage; farces, musical farces, operettas, pantomimes, though one must immediately add that along Reinhardt's path are also strewn 'The Oresteia,' 'King Lear,' 'Nathan the Wise,' 'The Bride of Messina,' 'Gyges and His Ring,' 'Miss Julia,' 'Peace on Earth!' 'Aglavaine and Selysette,' and 'The Well of the Saints.'

It is in pursuance of the same policy of holding the general public that Brahm and Reinhardt have been eager in their acceptance of what must inevitably be the very few plays that blend with ready theatrical acceptability the excellence of high Art.

Brahm has been granted such a play in 'The Sunken Bell,' in which Gerhart Hauptmann had a theme which required very much the treatment of the conventional romantic play, and which he was artist enough to give precisely the treatment it required. The Brahm theater has thus gained a production which is still widely popular in a time of reaction after the lapse of fifteen years and when past its three hundred and fiftieth performance, and yet which in its purity and sublimity is one of the masses of the modern soul.

Gerhart Hauptmann has offered Brahm the opportunity, moreover, to gain a second production of this type with his 'Beaver Coat.' This great 'Thieves' Comedy' is, indeed, one of the most austere of Gerhart Hauptmann's plays in its absolute avoidance of every theatric effect, in its development exclusively of the dramatic. It was for these reasons an absolute popular failure at its first production at the Deutsches Theater in the old days of L'Arronge before Brahm took over the management of the theater. It is a play, moreover, which is never likely to prove immediately acceptable to an untrained audience which seeks from the theater an external emotion. Such are the theatrical, if not theatric, power, and the human characterization of 'The Beaver Coat,' however, that when a general public has once been trained to comprehend its excellence, and with actors capable of embodying its characters, the play has a ready appeal for such a public second to the appeal of 'The Sunken Bell' alone among Gerhart Hauptmann's plays. Brahm had the actors capable of embodying



the characters, and he offered the public an opportunity to learn to understand the theatrical quality of the dramatic by means of his mighty production centered around Oscar Sauer's incomparable Wehrhahn, by far the greatest comic impersonation I have ever seen. Brahm has been rewarded by the assured hold that 'The Beaver Coat' has taken on the general Berlinese public. It was in 1897 that he gave his first production of the play, and in 1911, on New Year's Eve, when it is so important to give Berlin some particularly attractive comedy for the celebration of its cherished 'Sylvester-Abend,' 'The Beaver Coat' was chosen for the bill.

Reinhardt has gone for his readily acceptable works of dramatic Art primarily to Shakespeare,—how keen is George Moore's suggestion that the difference between Shakespeare and Ibsen lay in the abundance of Shakespeare's 'romantic spectacle' through which he conceded 'booths and roundabouts' for the pleasure of his audience.

Reinhardt found his first great popular Shakespearean success in 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream,' and such are the theatrical appeal and imaginative greatness of the comedy that, in spite of a most unequal production, it passed its two hundredth performance within ten months, and is still in its eighth season and well past its five hundredth performance, one of the most popular plays in the repertory of the Deutsches Theater. Reinhardt followed up the same vein with his almost consummate production of 'The Merchant of Venice,' a production marred only by a slight incursion of the theatric at the close, and with his quite consummate production of 'Twelfth Night,' an evocation of Romantic drama unparalleled within my knowledge.

Aristophanes was soon joined to Shakespeare, and 'Lysistrata' gained a wide, though less sweeping, popular success.

'Twelfth Night' and 'Lysistrata,' in these renderings, have for the general public much the same appeal as operettas, yet they elevate that public with the very highest elevation of beauty. At 'Twelfth Night' I lost all sense of the theater, and passed into an imaginative communion with Shakespeare such as I had never had in a theater before; the second act of 'Lysistrata' brought to me a realization I had never before possessed of the essential nature of Greek drama.

Brahm and Reinhardt understand perfectly, moreover, that, since they conduct expensive and unsubsidized theaters, they must play a play popularly successful just as long and as often as the public want to see it. Nothing holds back the English and American stages more than the theorizing about different types of theaters. We are told about the necessity of the repertory system, and of every other system. The important thing is not to secure any special system but to secure a high theater and to

maintain it. Even Mr. Granville Barker, with his practical experience in theater-management, 'fancies' that no play may be given oftener than four times a week at the Deutsches Theater. Mr. Barker's fancy is quite misguided. It is frequent for even a moderately popular production both at the Deutsches Theater and at the Lessing-Theater to be given five times a week. Nor does either Reinhardt or Brahm hesitate for a moment, when the public wants a play every night, to give them exactly what they want. Both these great artists in theater-management know that the public of a large modern city is like nothing in the world so much as a flock of sheep. The public rush blindly to a certain theater and a certain production this season; next season they refuse to pay the slightest attention to precisely the same theater and the same production, but their sheep-instinct carries them with equal velocity and equal blindness in some quite different direction. The worst of the situation is that no one can possibly know who are the bell-wethers of the flock so that he can succeed in regulating its movements. The most amusing instance of this sheep-instinct which I know was the attitude of the Berlinesse public toward Brahm's production of 'The Pillars of Society' in 1907. It seemed in the spring of 1907 as if the password had gone throughout Berlin that every one in the city must see that consummate production, and see it as quickly as possible. Between the first night on March 16th, and the closing of the season on May 8th, the play was given for thirty-three out of forty-four evening performances,— a new production in Berlin is never given in the afternoon for the quite different afternoon public. The demand for seats was far from satisfied, but Brahm had a binding engagement to take his company to Vienna. About the middle of August he re-opened his theater, and repeated 'The Pillars of Society' in performances as great as ever. The audiences were still large, but there was no longer the same headlong rush for seats. The sheep were now flocking in another direction. Both Brahm and Reinhardt have learned long since, in fact, that when the flock is rushing in their direction it is their first duty not to theorize about a repertory system, but to shear off golden fleece as vigorously and as long as possible.

One of the most striking instances of this policy is the 'run' of Schönherr's powerful tragedy, 'Faith and Fatherland,' at the Lessing-Théater in the last season and in this. The play was given for the first time in Berlin on Tuesday, March 14, 1910. In spite of the great success which the play had had throughout Germany, the ever-cautious Brahm took advantage of the repertory system to try his way with the play. It was given four additional performances up to March 20th. The sweeping success had then been demonstrated, and the play was given every evening from March 21st to April 4th, inclusive. The run was then interrupted by a single



performance of 'The Lady from the Sea.' 'Faith and Fatherland' was given again every evening from April 6th to the close of the season on June 1st, inclusive, with the exception of Good Friday, April 14th, when the theater was closed. The repertory-system of the Lessing-Theater during these weeks was maintained only in the afternoon performances. The run was resumed at the re-opening of the theater on Wednesday, August 2d, and the play was given every evening to the close of the Spieljahr on Thursday, August 31st,—the German theatrical time is measured by the Spieljahr running from September 1st to September 1st, not by the season,—with the exception of a performance of Schnitzler's 'Anatol' on August 24th, a performance interposed by the ever-shrewd Brahm, I suspect, so that the one hundredth performance of 'Faith and Fatherland' might come on Saturday, August 26th, instead of on the preceding evening, since Saturday and Sunday are the two favorite nights in Berlin for attending the theater. The new Spieljahr was opened on September 1st with the great tragic actress, Irene Triesch, who had not been able to act since the preceding January, in one of her most popular impersonations, Hedda Gabler. On September 2d, however, 'Faith and Fatherland' immediately reappeared in the bill, and until September 19th it was given every evening of each week except one. From September 20th to September 24th it alternated with the first production of the season, Herbert Eulenberg's 'Alles um Geld.' As this play met with so little popular favor that it was only given three times, 'Faith and Fatherland' resumed its dominance of the repertory, and between September 25th and September 30th the play had four out of six evening performances. During September it had twenty-two performances out of a total of thirty-four for all plays in the repertory. This dominance was continued during the first half of October, the play being given on every evening but three from October 1st to October 13th. October 14th brought the first production of the season to attract wide attention with Schnitzler's 'Broad Land,' and, for the first time since March, 'Faith and Fatherland' did not dominate the repertory. It was still given on every evening, however, when 'The Broad Land' was not in the bill, and added seven performances to its record before the end of the month. During November, up to the production of Hardt's 'Gudrun,' November 24th, 'Faith and Fatherland' resumed its preponderance, leading 'The Broad Land' by two performances. The one hundred and fiftieth performance was given on November 15th, one day more than seven months after the first performance, and during two of these seven months the theater had been closed. On the afternoon of Wednesday, November 22d, the play was first brought out for the low-price subscription performances of the Freie Volksbühne, performances that generally herald the be-

ginning of the presentation of a play to the afternoon public. During the last part of November and December 'Faith and Fatherland' was still being frequently played. Such a run, I suppose, must meet the stern disapprobation of Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. P. P. Howe, and other theorists about repertory theaters. Brahm has learned from experience, however, that it is only by such profit from the public support while he has it that a manager can maintain a theater.

As to Reinhardt, he first became firmly established in theater-management through the 'Serenissimus-Zwischenspiele,' produced on November 15, 1901, and given for the three hundredth time on the afternoon of April 12, 1903, and became a real theatrical force through Gorky's 'From the Depths of Life,' to which people will persist in giving the far less expressive title of 'The Night Lodging,' which was produced on January 23, 1903, and given every evening up to its one hundred and fiftieth performance on June 23, 1903, followed by the two hundred and fiftieth performance on October 14, 1903, the three hundredth on January 13, 1904, the four hundredth on August 14, 1904, and the five hundredth on May 5, 1905.

Last spring, in fact, both the Lessing-Theater and the Deutsches Theater had for a few weeks simultaneously ceased to be repertory theaters, since, while 'Faith and Fatherland' was at the very height of its popular triumph, the Deutsches Theater was playing every evening the Second Part of 'Faust.'

Brahm and Reinhardt have, however, generally maintained the repertory system, with a repertory of varying extent according to the volume of the popular demand for the plays comprising it but only abandoned altogether in the case of an unusual popular success. I think that in this policy they have been very wise. They have thereby secured an opening for plays of a nature scarcely likely to win a sweeping success at the time of the first production,— plays, indeed, to which the public at first will not respond,— but plays, also, that are sometimes more lasting popular successes than the productions which have the first widely spread momentary appeal. I have already spoken of Brahm's 'Beaver Coat.' Brahm, since he moved from the Deutsches Theater to the Lessing-Theater, has had a second success of this kind in 'Hedda Gabler,' a production of which, though it is the most intellectually exacting performance that I know, the attraction seems to be ever fresh; Reinhardt has such a success in his repertory in his consummate production of Hebbel's 'Gyges and His Ring.'

By the repertory system, moreover, it is possible to give occasional performances of plays which have a sure support, though one less pronounced than the support of the plays of wide appeal, since their support comes from people who are not drawn to the theater by a momentary whim, but



by love of drama; by the system it is possible to keep popular successes alive; often, as I have shown, for years; by the system a manager can sometimes gain support for plays to which the public does not immediately respond; by the system it is not necessary to force a success; by the system there are plays in readiness to cover the retreat from a popular failure.

It is largely by means of the repertory system, moreover, that Brahm and Reinhardt are able to show the other quality beside caution which is necessary for an artist in theater-management, that is to say, courage. Beside the play intended to win immediate and general popular success they are able to produce other plays intended to win the support only of smaller publics, and some, indeed, that are clearly so unacceptable to the general public that they are obviously produced only for their own sakes. With such productions Brahm and Reinhardt have not merely satisfied the love of Art which is the force that impels them, but have also built up a support which has been of great value to their theaters, the support of the artistically exacting. Within the general public, the managers have developed a smaller one, and within the smaller one yet smaller and yet smaller, until we reach the group, almost identical for the two theaters, who almost never go to any other theater in Berlin, and who make it a point of honor to attend every production at the Lessing or at the Deutsches Theater. These inner publics, even the innermost group, are of considerable size,—there are hundreds of people in Berlin whom I know by sight simply from the frequency with which I have seen them at the Lessing and at the Deutsches Theater,—and this support could only have been gained by productions which, from the point of view of immediate and general success, seemed bold or even rash.

Brahm and Reinhardt, in pursuance of their policy of building up an artistic public within the general public, have always so regulated the price of seats as to draw the support of all play-lovers, whatever their means may be. And the managers have been richly rewarded. They have thus built up the gallery-public of first nights at the Lessing and at the Deutsches Theater, a public which for obvious distinction is one of the sights of the world. The gallery is always full at these theaters, moreover, whatever may be the case in other parts of the house. Nor does one hear in Berlin of the fine plays which the managers would like to produce for the stalls except for the lack of comprehension of the gallery; one hears, rather, of the fine plays which might be produced for the gallery, but for the people with money and without taste who sit downstairs. In many of the first-night battles between a pioneering dramatist and a recalcitrant audience it is the gallery which has principally championed the cause of Art.

It is by the same method of a wide appeal that there has been built up

the most democratic public of the world, the audience of the half-priced performances on Sunday afternoons at the Lessing-Theater. There is no other theatrical privilege I so cherish, not even participation at a Brahm or Reinhardt first-night, as the inclusion in this miscellaneous throng when a play by Ibsen or Gerhart Hauptmann is mounted, sometimes in a rendering which in America would tax the subtlest intelligences, and is indeed understood of the people.

It is so clearly understood in Berlin that a restriction of prices to a high scale would be like killing the goose that laid the golden egg that even in the intimate theaters without any balconies, which have been so the vogue of late years, provision is made for playgoers of small means. In the Kammerspiele of the Deutsches Theater, while seats in the first two rows cost three dollars and a half, one can obtain a seat as near the front as the twelfth for a dollar and a quarter. A friend, one of the most elevated spirits of the modern theater, who disagrees with me concerning the necessity of this gradation of prices, maintains that Reinhardt is able to continue this scale because the main house of the Deutsches Theater helps to carry the Kammerspiele. At the Kleines Theater, however, which no larger theater helps sustain, there are also seats, though not, as I remember, so near the front, for about the same price. This policy is pursued rather, I think, because the managers perceive how necessary it is, unless they are willing to allow their theaters to become mere toys of the idle rich.

It is by the methods I have outlined that the two great theaters of Berlin have been maintained at their elevation without a subsidy; it is by very similar methods that the other members of the little group of managers have conducted their theaters, though I have chosen my illustrations almost entirely from the Berlines stage because it is the stage which I happen to know best, and also because Berlin is to-day the theatrical capital of the world.

Now what have we to learn, even at this time of theatrical reaction, from the management of these theaters?

This little group of artists, scattered through Europe, have proved in the first place, I think, the perfect fairness, in fact, the necessity, if one is to do any sort of justice to the labors and privations which they have undergone, of the application of an artistic standard to theater-management,—an application which American opinion never admits as legitimate. Mr. Norman Hapgood pungently suggested a few years ago that the attitude of Mr. Charles Frohman towards the plays which he produced was precisely the attitude of some estimable chewing-gum manufacturer toward the product of his factory. And nobody in America seems to realize that one can possibly expect the manager of an unsubsidized theater to have any



other attitude. The manager of such a theater, we are told, has to earn his living and support a theater. He must produce, therefore, the plays that bring him the largest remuneration. One might apply precisely the same standard in any other Art. A novelist, too, must earn a living and support a family. And such a novel as 'The Sorrows of Satan' is more remunerative than such a novel as 'Beauchamp's Career.' Yet we do hard-heartedly persist in forming our standard of fiction from George Meredith, and in applying that standard to the inimitable Miss Corelli. A playwright must earn a living. And a play like 'Pomander Walk' is more remunerative than a play like 'The Playboy of the Western World.' Yet we do form our standard of drama from Synge, and apply that standard to the voluble, inglorious Napoleon of 'Disraeli.' Now the difference between the man who wrote the project for the Théâtre Libre, between that man himself and the other courageous, tireless artists who have fulfilled such projects, and Mr. David Belasco is precisely similar to the difference between George Meredith and Miss Corelli. And I, for one, prefer to form my conception of the theater-manager from Otto Brahm and André Antoine. And I shall not be deterred from applying to every manager the standard they have set by the parrot-cry of practicality.

Nothing is more detrimental to American thought, in fact, than the false and incomplete practicality which is set in opposition in this country to every manifestation of idealistic thought. American practicality nearly always derives its entire philosophy from the consideration of those aspects of the matter under discussion which are negative and base. The practicality which is valuable to a nation also includes within its scope those aspects of the matter which are positive and elevated.

Now how is this complete and true practicality to face the indubitable theatrical reaction?

We must not cherish the delusion for a moment, in the first place, that, however strong the reaction may prove, the dramatists will retreat to more facile dramatic forms. The religious dramatic movement of our day has so regenerated the art that no dramatist can for a moment think of abandoning his highest work merely because the public will not follow and support him. Human thought moves in great waves that surge and burst and die away. And it is the mission of the race to become so civilized that it can hold the waves before they burst and die away, so that the sea of life will be one great mass of waves at their height. But until that far-off day we can never be sure when the dying-away of the waves will come. And so a generation or two hence the drama may relapse into the idle trickery of craftsmen. And we who love the theater cannot rejoice too greatly that it has been our portion to live when a theatrical wave was at its height;

when 'Ghosts' and 'The Power of Darkness' and 'Michael Kramer' were being added to drama, and when one need only go down to the Lessing-Theater to see Else Lehmann and Oscar Sauer, I sha'n't say 'act,' because the word 'act' is too inexpressive, but impersonate. Whatever dramatic relapse may come in a generation or two, it cannot come in our time. Too great have been the dramatic examples which have flamed on before us. We have had the stern and tender art of Henrik Ibsen. We have had Gerhart Hauptmann, who has purged the drama of every theatric element, and who, through love, has comprehended every manifestation of life and sympathized with it. We have had the ecstasy of Tolstoy, in which love was raised to such a pitch that it became partly insane, but with so noble and inspiring an insanity. We have had the passionate truthfulness of Strindberg, tearing his breast like a pelican. We have had the rigorous self-discipline of Schnitzler's rise from excellence to greatness. After these men who shall suggest to the dramatists retreat? I cannot perceive any dramatic reaction. Every dramatist still writes his plays 'to express a dream which has taken possession of his mind,'—one must always cite that great phrase of Yeats'. If there is no theater open to a dramatist's plays, he will continue to write them for the theater of his own soul. The dramatists cheerfully leave all the remunerative, sordid, ignoble things which the world calls success to the playwrights. Their own success lies in the disinterested labor for beauty which is the heavy burden that she imposes as well as the inestimable reward that she grants to all those to whom she vouchsafes the boon of being her servants. 'And . . . they will think they are well paid.'

Shall we be able to organize theatrical representations in America so that we of the public shall learn to know the dramatist's work, not merely in book form, but in the theater for which it is intended?

I can only say that, in the first place, I have by no means lost hope of the practicability of establishing a regular theater of a high type in America.

We must be prepared, in the first place, to renounce every external attraction in the theater, and to make the play, in very truth, the thing. That is, it seems to me, the chief lesson of The Irish National Theater Society. That remarkable Society has clearly perceived that excellence lies in the admirable thing performed, even when performed under almost squalid conditions. By the simplification to which it has rigorously held itself it has assured itself, as has the Artistic Theater through its large resources, of the repertory system, of the ability to devote itself entirely to plays with beauty, and even of much the same freedom to play the play it wants to play at the time it wants to play it. It was, perhaps, *cibris*, as in a Greek tragedy or in a tragedy by Gerhart Hauptmann, which led



Antoine first to plan in 1890 to transform the Théâtre Libre from a theater with occasional subscription performances to a regular theater, and which carried Brahm in 1894 from the Chairmanship of the Freie Bühne to the management of the regular Deutsches Theater. When I recollect what achievements the years have brought which have intervened, I cannot regret these steps. But, perhaps, the lesson which these recent years, when even Berlin has preferred 'The Concert' to 'Griselda' and 'Faith and Fatherland' to 'The Rats,' should teach is that we must return to the simple conditions with which the European independent theaters of the eighties commenced and which The Irish National Theater Society has retained.

The theater we should plan, if we may outline the nature of our imaginary theater as Hilde Wangel did the nature of her 'castle in the air,' would be a theater in an inexpensive situation, though in one as accessible as possible for the various segments of the 'remnant,' drawn from all social and economic groups, which would form the public of the theater. Our theater would be free, if it should be obliged to economize, from every needless expense in decoration and fittings: we should, if possible, attain beauty, but a simple beauty. Our theater would rigidly refrain from scenery in the slightest degree spectacular. Strindberg tells in his mighty 'Dramaturgy' of a curious experience in regard to the production of his play, 'Astarte' ('Rausch') at the little theater in Stockholm which for some years was devoted exclusively to the performance of his plays. 'Astarte' was mounted on a stage with wings painted as pillars in neutral colors, and in a style which had never existed in reality. These wings remained unchanged throughout the performance, and the changes of scene were denoted by the back-drops, a few pieces of furniture and other requisites, and by the lighting. Strindberg says that he attended a private performance for an audience comprised of artists, and that he asked members of the audience afterwards if the pillars had disturbed them. No one had even noticed these pillars! And Strindberg states that he, himself, could not say whether the pillars had been left during the scene in the night restaurant, or whether the room had been enclosed in the conventional way. He adds, 'So little does the scenery matter in a play in which the substance of the play can absolutely enthrall the attention.' I quite disagree with Strindberg in regard to the negligibility of scenery. I believe rather with Antoine that the scenery 'should not merely furnish a setting for the action, but should determine its nature and constitute its atmosphere.' I have found Strindberg's statement very suggestive, however, as to the indifference of a truly artistic audience to scenery which does not pertain to the play. The scenery which does pertain to the play may be attained at very slight expense. It has been my pleasure since coming to Boston, for example, to see

photographs of some mountings attained by Mrs. Clement at her little theater under what were necessarily the simplest conditions, mountings which even from the photographs I could at once perceive to have a purely artistic quality all too rare on the American stage. Our theater, if it could not afford to engage actors at high salaries, would be quite content with the engagement of actors with low. It would not be the desire of our theater to attract by the display of any single actor or scene, but by a symmetrical composition that would interpret the meaning of the play. And our theater would know that such an interpretation is often secured by an intelligent mounter from actors without any particular training, but with intelligence and good-will. And whether our theater should possess small resources or large, it would persistently avoid those conspicuous actors, great rather in their own esteem than in reality, whose minds are centered on them themselves, and on their own opportunities, not simply on the entire artistic composition in which they are merely the details. Though, needless to say, our theater would, if possible, secure those truly great actors who, like the greatest actor I know, Else Lehmann, rise to be what Ibsen required actors to be in his essay, 'The Theatrical Crisis,' 'priests of Art,' and who do absolutely subordinate themselves to the complete work of theatrical Art.

In a theater thus free from every useless expense I cannot see why it should not be quite feasible for an artist in theater-management, if one should arise in America, to maintain a high theater by the same true practicality, the same consideration both of dramatic Art and of his public, the same courage and shrewdness, by which the great European artists have maintained their theaters. Such an artist, even if possessed of the highest ability, would indubitably have assumed a most exacting task, but I do feel that he would have a fighting chance. And he might well realize that there is no joy in life, no real success, comparable to the going out to fight for a high cause which fills one's life, and in that fight to face undauntedly sacrifice and poverty and, if need be, death. And this artist might know that, even if his enterprise should fail to accomplish what he had hoped, he would have performed his duty to the Art he served, and that he would have taken one step further toward the ultimate attainment of his cause.

For I know that ultimately the theater of Art shall be attained for which we are striving, though the labor of this generation and of many generations may seem to be in vain. It is not for nothing that I have been, as it were, admitted to non-resident membership in the great artistic democracy of Berlin; it is not for nothing that I have watched the untrained, chaotic aspiration of America surging in all the Arts toward beauty. I know that even the general public is capable of being trained for the per-



ception of excellence, though the difficulty of the task, the obstinacy of the old Mammon, may render such training long and difficult. We are all and one of us nothing and less than nothing. Our effort is to build up a high theater for the generations which shall come after us. And we may go into battle knowing that such a theater will be built, though perhaps not in our day, nor even in many days.

While we are waiting for the sure attainment of our goal, I feel that we may do much to attain a knowledge in the theater of the plays which are beyond the range of our vulgar stage by the organization of amateur performances. I see no reason why cultivated people, instead of wasting their time on things absolutely futile, should not apply themselves to the rendering of plays of value. Admirable productions may be secured, moreover, by intelligent and zealous people with whom acting is not a vocation but an avocation. The Studio Club of Buffalo produced two little plays of my own last spring, and I had the privilege, almost never vouchsafed an American playwright, of watching performances take shape which possessed true artistic culture. Again, I went back to Buffalo from New York this autumn after seeing The Irish National Theater Society in twelve plays, and almost immediately attended amateur performances of Yeats' 'Land of Heart's Desire' and 'Pot of Broth' without the slightest sense of an artistic fall. These admirable amateur actors of Buffalo lacked, no doubt, certain technical accomplishments of their Irish colleagues, but they did place an admirable technique at the service of a conception of their office quite as elevated as the conception of the Irish themselves. Since the Irish season, indeed, unfortunately brought us only one play by Yeats, these performances filled a void which I had distinctly felt, and enabled me to enter into further communion with that puissant spirit. It is quite feasible to build up amateur performances, which may not, indeed, satisfy those who seek in the theater the things the absence of which in Molière so pleased George Meredith, 'dazzling flashes of achievement,' but which will amply satisfy those who come to the theater, not to be dazzled or to be thrilled, but for the realization and the comprehension of the play.

We shall greatly aid the ultimate achievement of our theater, moreover, if we shall succeed in attaining a course free at once from undue severity and undue laxity. Let us not allow ourselves to be deterred by the complaints of the weaklings from forming our standards of the dramatist, the theater-manager, the stage-manager, and the actor, from the very highest models whom an ardent love of the theater and eager study may reveal to us, or from applying such standards rigorously to every dramatist, theater-manager, stage-manager, and actor in America. When the cry of

practicality is raised against us, as it is certain to be raised, let us recall that it was precisely by such rigor that the Berlinesse theater was revolutionized and that modern Berlinesse theatrical culture was founded. To me, at least, the play method which has led to such a play as 'The Rats,' to such theater-management and stage-management as Otto Brahm's, and to the impersonations of Else Lehmann, seems more practical than the method which has led to such a play as 'Disraeli,' such theater-management and stage-management as Mr. David Belasco's, and to the performances of Miss Maud Adams. If we persist, however, in applying the test of the best performances of the theater, not of the mediocre and the bad, let us also be quick to perceive by every highly-developed sense the slightest striving or aspiration toward excellence, and to make clear our perception without one abatement of our standard. And, in the particular instance of the theater-manager, when we have once comprehended that a manager is striving for a high theater, let us not carp, let us not brand him for the things he does not achieve, but let us always recall the obstacles which hamper his course. For the first word and the last word must be the difficulty, the difficulty, of the task. And it is only by the disinterested and tireless co-operation of dramatist, theater-manager, actor, critic, and audience that we shall at last be able to organize a theater worthy of the designation which no temporary degradation, not even a degradation for centuries, can keep from being the designation of the only place where one can fully comprehend Eschylus and Shakespeare and Ibsen.



# A PERENNIAL WITTICISM *versus a Shakespearean Crux*

BY LOUIS N. FEIPEL

**I**N Act IV, Scene 1, of the 'Comedy of Errors,' Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus enter to the Second Merchant, Angelo, and an Officer, and the following colloquy ensues:

*Officer.*— . . . See where he comes.

*Antipholus of Ephesus.*— While I go to the goldsmith's house,  
go thou

And buy a rope's end; that will I bestow

Among my wife and her confederates,

For locking me out of my doors by day.

But, soft! I see the goldsmith. Get thee gone;

Buy thou a rope and bring it home to me.

*Dromio of Ephesus.*— I buy a thousand pound a year! I buy a rope!  
[*Exit.*]

This parting utterance of Dromio has continued to be regarded as a crux up to the present day.\*

No commentator has suggested a plausible reason for the making of this remark. And yet several satisfactory explanations offer themselves to the reader, all of them based upon what we have styled, in our heading, a perennial witticism. This universal conceit is nothing else than a curious psychological association of a rope with a fortune of some sort, or its monetary equivalent.

First of all, we shall dispose of one such association in the words of Shakespeare himself. It would seem, indeed, that our poet, in the closing years of his dramatic career, had harked back to this particular passage, and placed the conceit embodied therein in a new setting, thereby affording — whether consciously or unconsciously, we know not — an adequate paraphrase for this otherwise enigmatical expression. The reader must recall the scene in 'Cymbeline,' V, iv, where the jailer, speaking to Posthumus

\* In another early play, viz., '3 Henry VI' (II, ii, 144), there is, perhaps, a similar allusion contained in the words of Edward:

A wisp of straw were worth a thousand crowns

To make this shameless callat know herself.

Cf. also 'Merchant of Venice,' II, ii, 107: '*Gobbo.*— . . . My master's a very Jew. Give him a present? Give him a halter! I am famished in his service.'

(who is about to be hanged), descants upon the virtues of a rope — and specifically upon its debt-liquidating qualities — as follows:

*First Gaol.*—Hanging is the word, sir . . . ; a heavy reckoning for you, sir. But the comfort is, you shall be called to no more payments, fear no more tavern bills; which are often the sadness of parting, as the procuring of mirth; you come in faint for want of meat, depart reeling with too much drink; sorry that you have paid too much, and sorry that you are paid too much; purse and brain both empty,—the brain the heavier for being too light, the purse too light being drawn of heaviness; of this contradiction you shall now be quit. O the charity of a penny cord! it sums up thousands in a trice; you have no true debtor and creditor but it; of what's past, is, and to come, the discharge:—your neck, sir, is pen, book, and counters; so the acquittance follows:\*

Turning back, now, to the exclamation of Dromio, we can readily see the probable train of thought that is running through his mind, as he utters the words, 'I buy a thousand pound a year! I buy a rope!' In the light of the passage, quoted from 'Cymbeline,' we may be permitted to believe that Dromio imagines himself to be sent to buy a rope for Antipholus to hang himself with; and in this belief he conceives of the rope as being the quittance of a debt equivalent to a thousand pounds. In other words, if a man were in debt to that amount, and could not provide the money, he could yet liquidate the debt by means of a mere piece of rope.

The other exemplifications of the witticism contained in this perennial association of a rope with a fortune are deserving of an equal consideration. The earliest instance that has come to the notice of the writer is contained in Lucian's 'Dialogues of the Dead,' No. 9, where Simylus and Polystratus, two old men, meeting on the other side of Styx, exchange greetings, and Polystratus, as the newcomer, relates the events of his last days on earth. In the course of his inquiries, Simylus asks Polystratus, 'And how did you dispose of your fortune in the end?' To which Polystratus replies, 'I gave each an express promise to make him my heir; he believed, and treated me to more attentions than ever; meanwhile, I had another genuine will, which was the one I left, with a message to them all to go hang.'

Ausonius, a Latin writer of the fourth century, embodied this rope-fortune witticism in an epigram which Burton, in his 'Anatomy of Melancholy' (I, ii, 4, 7), has paraphrased thus: 'A poor fellow went to hang himself, but finding by chance a pot of money, flung away the rope, and went merrily home; but he that hid the gold, when he missed it, hanged himself with that rope, which the other man had left, in a discontented humour.'

\* Cf. 'Tempest,' III, ii, 140: 'He that dies pays all debts.'



This has likewise been rendered into English verse by a writer in *Punch*, as follows:

### ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER

A poor man went to hang himself,  
But treasure chanced to find;  
He pocketed the miser's pelf,  
And left the rope behind.

His money gone, the miser hung  
Himself in sheer despair:  
Thus each the other's wants supplied,  
And that was surely fair.

The next instances in order of time are taken from a group of Elizabethan playwrights who own relationship to one another in several respects other than that now under consideration. These playwrights are Kyd, Jonson, Rowley, and Davenant. Hieronymo, in the 'Spanish Tragedy,' compares the rope wherewith he proposes to hang himself to a fortune, and cries out:

And, princes, now behold Hieronimo,  
Author and actor in this tragedy,  
Bearing his latest fortune in his fist.

The Germans have a proverb, *Hoffnung ist ein dickes Seil: es hat schon mancher sich tot daran gezogen*. The truth of this adage has been exemplified repeatedly, particularly in the cases of those who have hanged themselves 'on the expectation of plenty.' So also misers, who, as Burton says, 'are afraid of want, that they shall die beggars, which makes them lay up still, and dare not use that they have; what if a dear year come, or dearth, they would be hanged forthwith, and sometimes die to save charges, and make away themselves, if their corn and cattle miscarry; though they have abundance left.'\*

And we even have the opposite case, in Jonson's 'Every Man Out of His Humour,' in the character of Sordido, who attempts to hang himself upon the receipt of the good news (but to him *evil* news) that there will shortly be an excellent crop of corn.

In Jonson's 'The Case is Altered' (1599), the beggar Jaques digs a hole in the ground in the courtyard at the back of his house, and buries his gold in it. The two rascals, Juniper and Onion, in trying to come at Rachel, the daughter of Jaques, repair to the courtyard and are surprised by the girl's father. Onion gets up into a tree and escapes detection; but Juniper is discovered and driven off by Jaques. Onion, in his terror, utters this

\* Anatomy of Melancholy, I, ii, 3, 13.

ejaculation from the tree, in an aside: 'Ah, pitiful Onion, that thou hadst a rope!' As who should say, 'If I only had a rope now, I could hang myself on this tree and be delivered from this danger.' But no sooner does Jaques depart, after making sure that his treasure is still safe, than Onion, who has taken the whole performance in, comes down from the tree and appropriates the beggar's fortune to himself and to his colleague, Juniper. And thus we see that Onion longed for a rope, but came into possession of a fortune instead.

In Jonson's 'Magnetic Lady' (1632), Act V, Sir Moth Interest, the usurer, is gulled into believing that a treasure has been concealed in a well, and hoping to make himself master of it, he goes to the hiding-place, and falls in. This accident is reported to Lady Loadstone and the others by Rut, who rushes into their presence with these words:

*Rut.*— Help. . . . Sir Moth Interest  
Is fallen into the well.

*Lady Loadstone.*— Where, where?

*Rut.*— In the garden.

A rope to save his life!

*Compass.*— How came he there?

*Rut.*— He thought to take possession of a fortune  
There newly dropped him, and the old chain broke,  
And down fell he in the bucket.

*Compass.*— Is it deep?

*Rut.*— We cannot tell. A rope, help with a rope.

In this case, he who expected to secure a fortune was thankful to receive the aid of a mere rope.

In Act I of Rowley's 'A Match at Midnight' (1633), Randall, the Welshman, finds the bag of money, containing a hundred pounds, which the Captain had concealed in a barn.

*Randall.*— Hur have got hur pag and all by the hand, and hur had ferily thought in conscience, had not been so many round sillings in whole worlds, but in Wales: 'twas time to supply hur store, hur had but thirteen-pence halfpenny in all the worlds, and that hur have left in hur little white purse (with a rope hur found by the parn) just in the place hur had this. . . .  
[Exit.]

*Enter CAPTAIN and LIEUTENANT*

*Captain.*— . . . What a witty rogue 'twas, to leave this fair thirteen-pence halfpenny and this old halter; intimating aptly,



Had the hangman met us there, by these presages,  
Here had been his work, and here his wages.

Later on, in Act II, Alexander Bloodhound comments upon this incident, thus: 'Possible! Thus cheated of an hundred pieces! a handsome halter and the hangman's wages popt in the place? What an acute wit we have in wickedness!'

In Davenant's 'The Wits' (1636), Engine, the steward to Sir Tyrant Thrift, practises upon the avarice of his master by leading him to believe that he is the legatee of a heap of gold which, along with a rope of pearl, lies hidden in a chest and buried in a church. Thrift obtains the key of the chest from Engine, and hies himself to the place of sepulture, with the intention of securing the treasure, in carrying out which purpose he is apprehended.

*Enter THRIFT, with a candle.*

*Thrift.*— I cannot find where they have laid their coffin;  
But there's the chest: I'll draw it out, that I  
May have more room to search and rifle it.  
. . . How long, thou bright all-powerful mineral,  
Might'st thou lie hid, ere the dull dead, that are  
Entombed about thee here, could reach the sense  
To turn wise thieves, and steal thee from oblivion!

*[Opens it, and finds a halter.]*

How! a halter! what fiend affronts me with  
This emblem? is this the rope of orient pearl.\*

About this same time, Burton, in his 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' (III, i, 1, 2) relates that 'Timon, when he lived in prosperity, was the sole spectacle of Greece, only admired; who but Timon? . . . but when his gold was spent, his fair possessions gone, farewell Timon: none so ugly, none so deformed, so odious an object as Timon, no man so ridiculous on a sudden, they gave him a penny to buy a rope, no man would know him.'†

In the eighteenth century we meet with a recurrence of this witticism in an anecdote related by Goldsmith. 'Dick Wildgoose,' writes Goldsmith, 'was one of the happiest silly fellows I ever knew. . . . His inattention to money matters had incensed his father to such a degree that all the inter-

\* Act V, Scene 1.

† Or, as the beggar said in the comedy,  
Who more than his worth doth spend,  
Maketh a rope his life to end!

— *apud* 'The Worth of a Penny' (1667).

cession of friends in his favor was fruitless. The old gentleman was on his deathbed. The whole family, and Dick among the number, gathered round him. I leave my second son, Andrew, said the expiring miser, my whole estate, and desire him to be frugal. Andrew, in a sorrowful tone, as is usual on these occasions, "prayed heaven to prolong his life and health to enjoy it himself." I recommend Simon, my third son, to the care of his elder brother, and leave him beside four thousand pounds. "Ah! father," cried Simon (in great affliction, to be sure), "may heaven give you life and health to enjoy it yourself!" At last, turning to poor Dick, "as for you, you always have been a sad dog, you'll never come to good, you'll never be rich, I'll leave you a shilling to buy a halter." "Ah! father," cries Dick, without any emotion, "may heaven give you life and health to enjoy it yourself!" \*

A few instances of very recent date may well close this article. The first is a news item taken from the *Chicago Daily News* of March 22, 1906: 'A hempen cord was bequeathed to his wife by an Englishman who died recently. His will, which has just been "proved" in court, read as follows: "I give and bequeath to my daughter———all I now possess, or may possess now or hereafter, on condition that she pays or causes to be paid the sum of———pounds to each of my other daughters, or allows them the said value of———pounds from my goods and chattels that I leave. Also, that she shall pay to———the sum of three-pence half-penny for the purchase of a hempen cord or halter, for the use of my dear wife, which I trust she may make use of without delay."'

A similar news item appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* of Nov. 19, 1908. It read as follows: 'Philadelphia, Nov. 18,———. The feeling entertained by the late George D. Wolfe, of Sommerdale, a suburb of this city, toward Charles W. Wenzel, his son-in-law, is shown in the following paragraph in his will, which was admitted to probate to-day:

' "Fifty cents to be paid to my son-in-law, Charles W. Wenzel, a native of Huntingdon, Pa., to enable him to buy a good, stout rope, with which to hang himself."

'Mr. Wolfe left an estate valued at \$10,500.'

But the last and most recent exemplification of this conceit came to the notice of the writer one evening in December, 1909, while attending a popular 'picture-play' exhibition. The particular play in question was enacted by a French company of actors, and the plot was largely made up as follows: A miserly rich man is opposed to the marriage of his daughter with a young man who dwells in the room below them. On one occasion,

\**The Bee*, No. 2 (Oct. 13, 1759).



as the father is examining his wealth in his room, he is called out, and forgets to close the safe. A prying neighbor, seizing the opportunity, enters the room through a window, and attempts to make off with the booty; but, in the last moment, fearing detection, he decides to conceal the money for the time being. So he pries open the floor of the room, deposits the money, and closes the opening again. He then departs to await a more opportune time for completing his task. Soon afterwards, while the miser is undergoing the first shock of discovery over the lost valuables, the lover calls on the father and daughter. In his bewilderment, the father suspects the poor lover of the theft, drives him out of his apartments, and forbids his further visits. The lover, in despair, returns to his own room below and prepares forthwith to hang himself. He places the noose about his neck, and attaches the other end of the rope to the ceiling, just in the place where the valuables are concealed. As he leaps to his desired destruction, the weight of his body loosens the ceiling in that particular spot, and down come plaster, woodwork, valuables, and all. The fortunate unfortunate foreslows no time in gathering together the miser's lost wealth; he hastens up with it to the downcast father and daughter, and upon the strength of his having recovered the lost fortune, receives the maiden, together with a portion of the money, as his reward. Thus, in his case, a rope was the unexpected means of recovering and sharing a fortune.

# THE PARADOXICAL ETHICS OF BROWNING

BY OSCAR W. FIRKINS

THE ethics of Browning are omnipresent. Extract from the large mass and body of his poetical work the elements that deal with right and wrong, and his seventeen volumes would shrink and crumble into three or four. In his dramas the interest in conduct as a symptom of motive subjugates, one is half disposed to say, extinguishes the interest in fortune as the outcome of conduct. 'The Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' the strongest of his dramas, is cut through and through in all directions by the deepest rents of moral cleavage and disjunction. 'Pippa Passes' is all ethics; the whole series of 'Bells and Pomegranates' is pervaded by the same recurring element. The longer narratives are moral outward to the rind and inward to the core. 'The Ring and the Book' is the collation of a dozen or more distinct appraisals of the rights and wrongs in a web of intricate and variegated crime. 'The Red Cotton Night-Cap Country' and the 'Inn Album' unravel the complexities to which the feelings and conduct of mankind are liable under the weight of irrevocable crime and the stress of competing and contending instincts. The evidence of other works is hardly less decisive. 'Ferishtah's Fancies,' a chain of apologues, is ethical where it is not religious. In the dramatic lyrics, in 'My Last Duchess,' and 'Andrea del Sarto,' even in 'Herve Riel,' the light and shadow, with which the portraitures are flecked are subtly and continuously dependent on the moral changes in the souls depicted. Browning was one of those minds to whom experience itself is little more than a constant readjustment of their attitude toward Deity, the fiber of life is religious, and being religious, is ethical.

The ethics of Browning are multiplex. If you represent the course of morals by the current of a river, the path of Browning would be designated by a road not faithful to either bank, but crossing and recrossing the stream with a wayward pleasure in its inconsistencies. Browning hangs to both sides of more than one alternative. He has written poems that are cordials to orthodoxy and poems that are comforts to liberalism. He has spoken again and again for patriotism and liberty, and he has written an apology for Napoleon III. He has in the same drama dealt admiringly with Pym and Hampden, and tenderly with Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford.

He has scourged a liberal poet for the acceptance of conservative benefactions, and he has defended a skeptical bishop for soothing his disquiets with ecclesiastical revenues. He has made a bride's reserve on the subject of a somewhat dubious past the object in one poem of measureless invective, and the adjunct in another of transcendent magnanimity. He has written a drama in which the carols of a clear-souled maiden awaken remorse in two persons for the commission of an assassination, and distress in another for the failure to commit one. So lithe and sinuous, so pliant and ductile, so mutable and checkered was the poet's attitude. The ground of this, the sanction and rightness of it, it is safe to leave in provisional abeyance; the noting and proving of the fact will supply our immediate requirements.

The ethics of Browning are paradoxical. This term may serve as well as another makeshift to mark an element of considerable frequency and decided interest in the poet's work. There are cases, as every one knows, where virtue, in anomalous and unexampled situations, prescribes things that contradict the settled practice of good men and its own habitual and natural injunctions. It is this tilted or inverted virtue that Browning scans and cherishes. Goodness in its colorless routine, goodness placidly adherent to an unbending decalogue, goodness plodding in ancestral or contemporary ruts offered little to tempt or satisfy a mind that reveled in its eccentricities and marvels. The drawback on virtue is the approbation of the dullards; and various ways of meeting this objection have taxed the ingenuity of various writers. Mr. Kipling's way is to season his goodness with a *salt* of evil; Browning muffles his in the *guise* of evil. The taking of human life by other than judicial or military methods is everywhere reckoned among the gravest crimes; Browning loves nothing better than to search out cases which excuse or even justify this act. Luitolfo stabbing the prefect, Luigi planning the intendant's death, Anael urging her knife to the heart of the oppressor, the young man in the 'Inn Album,' with his fearless choice of the decisive and uttermost vengeance, Ivan Ivanovitch composedly lifting the axe, the descent of which is to leave a woman headless,— these are instances of that singular conjunction between the right motive and the act which is theoretically and seemingly wrong, which Browning found so stimulative and refreshing. His goodness is of that venturous and acrobatic type which delights in situations which imperil its own safety; it has the hardihood and the courage of the mountaineer; it walks upon ledges, it scales the precipice; it is not content with reverence and love; it requires the added tribute of astonishment.

The ethics of Browning are incisive. His judgment is a finely edged and firmly wielded blade which cleaves the great mass and clot of human thought and action with a straight, strong stroke, leaving along its path



unbroken walls and clean-cut edges. The timidities and falterings, the reserves and provisos of our tremulous and diffident moralities have little kinship with the unhampered and unhesitating force; the momentum and the certainty of the estimates of Browning. He was, as even a casual reading shows, disposed to subtlety and indirection, and the riddle and the marvel about him is that in his work the products of fine spun and intricate speculation have the sheer descent and fiery impact of uncalculating intuitions. The blade is the blade of Aquinas, but the stroke is the stroke of Luther. This incisiveness, combining with a paradox which we noted in a recent paragraph, imparts to his work a precipitous and Alpine contour, a perpendicular and peak-like profile, which suggests the scenery of Switzerland. The ethical awards of Browning have in some measure the dramatic effect of material catastrophes in other writers; the thoughts of some of his heroes have the substance and massiveness of deeds.

The ethics of Browning are capricious. In adopting the term caprice I am anxious not so much to abridge or change its meaning, as to relieve it of a part at least of its hostile implications. The sense in which it fits our poet is apparent in a well-known illustration, the poem called 'The Statue and the Bust.' The moral of this poem, as it simply and naturally suggests itself, might find interpretation in these words: If you want to do evil with your neighbor's wife or husband, you had better not dally over it or you may lose your chance. I do not cite this poem as a basis for aspersive or defiling inference; the rectitude of Browning is beyond the province of dispute. He wished nothing more than to prove the worth of promptitude, but the choice of this uncomely and misleading illustration from the myriads of available examples of the need and value of despatch denotes what I should call a high degree of irresponsibility. It would be hard to find a soul of equal depth and equal insight that so readily unclasped the leash and loosed the fetter from its own caprices. Associate these three elements, a mind of multiform and changing impulses, radiating like spokes in all directions, the rarest aptitude for the tracing or framing of recondite and impalpable connections, an irresistible propensity to give the longest tether and the freest play to the execution of its own impulses; and the poet's caprice is sufficiently accounted for. He had that alertness of temper to which mere activity is itself a magnet; he did things for the simple joy of doing them. That a position was defensible was of itself an incentive to defend it, and if it had the added zest of being assailable and assailed, the incitements to its maintenance were irresistible. He has written long poems, like 'Mr. Sludge the Medium' or 'Fifine at the Fair,' in palliation of frauds or support of laxities which the careful reader will hardly accuse him of seriously wishing to extenuate or defend. The love of paradox beguiles

him into momentary conflict with his own convictions. Like the dog in Mr. Quilp's alley, who had his kennel on the right but who sometimes crouched on the left to spring out with intensified effect on the unexpected and unguarded traveler, Browning is a little prone to amuse himself and amaze his readers by springing at them from the ambush of the anomalous or incredible. The ground of this is not, I think, abstruse. Caprice is the flower of security, as responsibility is the child of danger. The captain who knows and trusts the timbers of his ship will be careless and facetious amid the winds and waves that blanch the face and chill the heart of his dubious and quailing coadjutor. In Browning the sense of staunchness and wholeness in the frame and gearing of this little mundane craft, the reliance on vessel and pilot, is so simple and so strong that he can afford to be careless and even jocund amid the moans and tremors of those quaking souls to whom the world is a fragile raft driving on under a steady wind to inevitable breakers. He was earnest at bottom, indisputably so, but it chanced that the bottom in his case was lower down than that of most of us, and at the level, at which others grew serious, he continued irresponsible. Part of his work might be designated as the mere play — I use the word in all the vigor of its primal meaning — of a nimble and versatile intelligence rejoicing in its own dexterity and rating lightly any higher form of benefit than the suppling of its limbs and the disclosure of its aptitudes.

The ethics of Browning are speculative; they are conjectures, not reflections of experience. One who reads the life and works of Browning in conjunction will note the contrast between the gentle lapse and quiet coloring of his own untroubled days, and the vehemence and abruptness, the trenchancy and force of the scenes that constitute his narrative and drama. The narrow arc of actual collision with the stress and turbulence of human life bears, one suspects, a very slender ratio to the broad circumference of the literary view. The conceptions of Browning are often, though by no means invariably, excessive and unreal, conforming themselves to a scarcely stricter rule of likelihood than that which embraces in its ample sweep the vagaries of romance and the frolics of invention. I know this will be thought a hard saying; I know that there are no other poems more strongly steeped in the illusion of reality; but if we grope for the roots of that illusion we shall find that, aside from the vividness which as mere power of conception adheres as readily to insanity or delirium as to chastened and authenticated fact, the grounds of this semblance of reality are reducible to two, — the precision of the attributes and the conviction of the tone. It is seen, however, after moderate study, that the precision, vivid and often startling as it undoubtedly is, concerns itself mainly with garniture and circumstance and that the conviction is an incident of Browning's temper. Browning

was sure as other men are bilious; and the vehemence of his assertions is a most fallacious index of the staunchness of the league between his soul and an idea. The 'Ring and the Book,' where diverging and even opposite judgments of the same transaction receive successive and impartial benefit from the author's vigor of asseveration, is evidence enough of the volatile and floating nature of this seeming fixed and lasting certainty. The truth is that Browning is the victim of his strength; the intuitive or divining faculty had been lavished upon him in varied and incalculable abundance; projection into the distant and inaccessible was the prerogative and instinct of his mind. But it happens sometimes by a natural error that divination, which is designed to supplement, is used to supersede the work of observation, just as the gas and electric lights whose office is to make up for the interruptions of sunlight supply to persons of retiring tastes a ground for the exclusion of its presence. The man who is bright at guesses will guess where he ought to scrutinize. The 'Blot in the 'Scutcheon' is a noble and affecting work; yet reading it as an Englishman's picture of high-bred life in England, one can hardly fail to realize that Browning fell as much short of common faculty in his seizure of the obvious as he transcended and outstripped it in his grasp of the occult.

The effects of powers and practices, like those on the health and soundness of the poet's judgment may be clearly and readily surmised. Morals of this type will carry with them a suggestion of experiment and caprice, of levity and impulse, very different from the sober and impressive weight of the teachings of experience. The truths that have been cut or burnt into the human spirit by the sword and flame of its own delights and agonies, the truths whose worth and moment have found interpreters and spokesmen in the gallop of the blood or the tingling of the physical and spiritual nerves, — these are truths that admonish those who utter them of the gravity of words and the urgency of exactness. These are the attributes of George Eliot and Tolstoi; they are not the attributes of Robert Browning. The judgments, implicit or express of moral situations which make up so much of the pith and tissue of his narratives and plays, are the headlong verdicts of peremptory instincts on theoretic or ideal contingencies. Their mood is subjunctive rather than indicative; their end is quickening rather than guidance. The issues in George Eliot or Tolstoi have the solemnity of injunctions; the issues in Browning have the splendor of epigrams.

It is a truth, linked to the foregoing by obvious dependence and affinity, that the eye of Browning, in its view and judgment of an act, turns backward to the principle rather than forward to the consequence. It is the parentage rather than the offspring of a deed, the query 'What does it evince?' rather than the forecast 'What will it produce?' that excites his



special interest. We have so far been dealing mainly with the application of the poet's ethics, with the health and truth or the disease and error of his judgments on specific cases. Let us now turn to the study of his principles, a study in which we shall have occasion to survey under aspects more favorable to unclouded admiration, the height and greatness of a singularly strong and lofty nature.

The attitude of Browning toward the flesh and its appeal is embodied in the well-known lines of 'Rabbi Ben Ezra,' 'All good things are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!' Browning loved the earth, found it sweet and wholesome, and was simply and frankly glad in the elastic frame and agile senses that gave him access to its blooms and cordialities. His verse springs up with freshened melody when it glances at the nobler and lustier fruits of earth. It is in 'Saul' that he breaks out:

'And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,  
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine.'

But he never loiters over these allurements. The transitory gladness of his childlike abandonment to the vividness of these delights is supplanted and offset in the ensuing moment by a manlike promptness of renunciation. The body is to him no drudge or Helot, but a valued servant, or better, a faithful hound to be cherished, fondled, even loved, but yet to keep his distance and cut short his obtrusions on his master's better thought. Words like these might symbolize in a sort of rough similitude the poet's feeling toward the body and its claims. 'Give the dog a bone? No sir! Give him three bones. He brought in yesterday a half-score of partridges. What, sir! You want stroking, do you? Good dog! Fine fellow! There, that will do. Lie down, sir!' This mixture of generous allowance and curt dismissal, the highest, perhaps, of all sound and practicable views, is Browning's attitude toward every form of sensuous enjoyment.

The delight in bodily perfection, in strength of limb and power of muscle, is a point which, if not strictly ethical is so closely knit with the preceding truths as to excuse, or even claim, a momentary divagation. There was something in Browning that was eagerly and heartily responsive to the appeal of physical mass and force. Thews were lovable in his sight; he rejoiced, as Scott said of Richard I and Henry VIII, to look upon a man. It is singular and pregnant circumstance that he translated in the course of his life two dramas from Euripides, and that in both these dramas the Greek Hercules is a dominating and conspicuous figure. In conjunction with this it is helpful to note that the grip on life discoverable in the intenser forms of selfish or corporeal desire was in itself a source of interest to Browning. The depravity of the evil characters in 'The Ring and the Book' finds at least

a partial salve and lenitive in the upspringing and outreaching of their limitless vitality. In 'Aristophanes' Apology,' an extensive and neglected work, we have in the person of the comic dramatist himself a character not yet, I think, requited with its fitting donative of praise, in whose restless and tameless exuberance all forms of bodily and mental desire and capacity germinate and multiply and interlace with Amazonian fecundity and rankness. Here is a nature that wallows, so to speak, in life and, by that claim alone, commands our poet's interest.

The ethics of Browning are affirmative or positive. Goodness for him is not a curb but a spur, not a bar but an outlet, not a stand but a sally. The expansiveness of his nature makes him hostile to restraint; his faculty for enjoyment makes him disinclined to abstinence. Prudential and negative virtue, virtue that peers and shrinks and hesitates, is a thing to be rejected and condemned. The substance of his moral code is made up of such palpable and positive traits as love, fidelity, and sacrifice.

It follows that Browning is unplagued by misgiving, hardly knows in truth what the word 'scruple' means. This exemption is, of course, the natural effect of his moral intrepidity. Fear is the usual origin of scruple; and there was nothing so ungenial, nothing so impossible, to the mind of Browning as to accept the tutelage of fear. His feeling in regard to all bands and restrictions is impulsively and fearlessly liberal. Blood itself awoke in him no horror. The sanguine trail that marked the movements of the first Napoleon did not prevent him from glorifying that ruthless prince with what is perhaps the manliest and tenderest of all the current idealizations. The prompt recourse of his best and favorite characters to the rough justice of the axe and dagger has been noted and exemplified in an earlier paragraph. The relations of men and women are handled with equal fearlessness. The poet holds, if one may trust to obvious and almost certain inference, that as long as the case is undefiled with any tincture of betrayal or deceit — a reservation of tremendous breadth and import — men and women may prescribe their own relations. It is unsafe, unfair, perhaps, to speculate upon hypothesis, yet one is tempted to embody Browning's thought in some such guess as this: He would have said to Jane Eyre, 'Go with Rochester,' but he would have said to Shelley, 'Stay with Harriet.' It would be harsh to say that in the 'Blot in the Scutcheon' he approved or even condoned the unchastity of Mertoun and Mildred, but it is curious, it is even to our lawless moods a trifle amusing to observe how little it bothers him. No one can read the vivid poem of 'Respectability' without suspecting something random and precarious in Browning's tenure of that overvalued quality. In respect of truth he shows a like indulgence. The lovely woman who relates the

narrative of Count Gismond closes her tale with an instinctive falsehood. In the dramatic sketch of 'In a Balcony,' the reader wonders at the contrast between the heroism to which the lovers are raised in the sequel and the meanness of the deception that engages them at the outset. Nor must we fail to observe that Browning, languid in his antipathies, intense in his predilections, indisposed to fit his measurements of conduct to any definite or constant scale, was peculiarly liable to be snatched up and swept away by gusts of unexpected interest and sympathy for anything incisive or well-marked. His own fearless and unswerving honesty did not protect him from temporary surrender to the attractions of wily and insidious or even of tervastigating characters; he has a regard for Ogniben, a tolerance at least for Bishop Blougram.

All of this, seen in its true relation and perspective, takes little from the fame and moral worth of Browning. In some respects it is eminently noble; it is attended by a manly hatred of convention, the extent of which would have been almost infinite had it not found its frontier in a still manlier contempt. If his aversion to evil was lukewarm, his love of goodness was intense. His way of binding the lower nature would have been to loose the higher, in conformity with the same law by which in the ebb and flux of breathing the abdomen contracts as the chest enlarges. The depth of his trust in man and destiny was the source of that confidence which verged on recklessness. Imagine him speaking in terms like these to some troubled and inquisitive disciple: 'Do what you want to do? By all means. You want good surely,—love, freedom, the joy of art and verse, the outworking of the will and hopes of God? What, not that? You want gewgaws, a ribbon, a handful of silver, a larded office, a sputter of bravos? You want these things? Off with you, man! I do not preach to vermin.' The line of moral cleavage in the mind of Browning was designed to separate not so much the wrong from the right as the base from the noble. He looked on evil not with fear, but scorn; its wickedness he could perhaps have pardoned, its meanness made it infinitely loathsome.

Coherent with the trait just named is a noble superflux and fine redundancy of moral force and aspiration. The sense of obligation is lost in that of privilege; the yoke is easy and the burden light which ethics lays upon the stalwart frame of Browning. In contrast with our niggardly and grumbling virtue groping among its stunted hoards for just enough to liquidate the claims of duty, Browning fulfils, or rather forestalls, the assessment with the thoughtless lavishness of opulence. Our virtue, jealousy scanning the schedule of requirements, whimpers 'So much?' Browning acting on a converse impulse, cries out 'No more?' He actually wantons in heroisms and loyalties; he abandons himself to his better feelings with a shameless



hardihood that cannot be but shocking to that class of minds whose self-indulgence in this branch of luxury conforms to the precepts of a rigid moderation. There have been in history certain types of virtue, of which the spirit of courtesy, and the spirit of honor, in its narrower and prouder sense supply us with conspicuous examples, which have subjugated, not merely the will, but the hearts and imaginations of their votaries. They have made the men who served them not so much their thralls as lieges; they have evoked a loyalty which has imparted warmth and gladness to the execution of their least and lowliest commands, and has made men willing to anticipate, and even anxious to exceed, the date and measure of the service they prescribed. This zealous and chivalric frame of mind, frequent in religion but somewhat rare in morals, is the spring and principle of much of Browning's ethics. The Breton sailor guides the imperilled fleet through the rocks and shoals of the obstructed channel, and France, in the person of its admiral, invites him to define his recompense. Will he ask for land or gold, some merited and solid benefit? Not he! He must glut himself with the sweets of magnanimity; he will ask for nothing or, better yet, for some mere rag or bagatelle whose littleness shall merely heighten his refusal. 'Leave to go and see my wife . . . that he asked and that he got,— nothing more.' The boy in 'The Incident of the French Camp' is made of the same metal with the sailor; he must drain to the last exquisite and honeyed drop the full deliciousness of sacrifice. It may be urged that this is not an earthly type of goodness, not a rational or sober point of view, but the loveliness of these depictions, their power to strengthen and console, must be measured by another standard than their loyalty to facts. They lift our estimates of human nature at the very moment when those estimates confute them: the faith that is withdrawn from the creations reverts and adheres to their originator. The beliefs that overstep reality are realities themselves and evince an actual excellence in asserting an imaginary one.

The next trait in Browning's ethics is the emphasis of fidelity. His sympathy with those he cherished was deep and close to an exceptional and significant degree. He drew much from other souls; he lived and felt by union, one might almost say by coalescence with them; he made them to a large extent the paths and conduits for the conveyance and report of heavenly messages. This gift of man to man, which in the mind of Emerson was a lovely dream floating in bright indistinctness above the steadfast levels of undoubted and decisive acquisition, assumed in the mind of Browning all the vividness and all the helpfulness of satisfying an assured reality. It was natural enough that he should be keenly sensitive to the claims of so exalted and peculiar a connection, and we find, in confirmation of this forecast, that the sallies of magnanimity and brotherhood which so often

traverse and irradiate his work, display in his case the instinctive force and darting celerity which we commonly assign to selfish impulse. The possession of personal interests and desires has one irresistible attraction for the character of Browning; they give a man the joy of trampling on them in the service of his country or his friends. Nowhere else is fidelity so absolute, so unhesitating, so exultant, as in the narratives and dramas of this self-renouncing mind. Festus rejecting the heaven, the gates of which are shut to Paracelsus; Anael admitting by her final cry the godhead of her erring lover; Gwendolen supreme in love and scorn as she recalls the shrinking Austin to the succor of the prostrate Mildred; Luria constant to the city that distrusts and betrays him; Valence pleading for redress to Cleves, when the hand of the woman he loves is the transporting alternative; Norbert choosing the death that united him with Constance rather than the throne which would divide them,—these are beings which are as natural and indigenous in the world of Browning's fancy as they are scarce and solitary in the world of selfish fact. The inference as to Browning's own temper is clear and incontestable; the lapse of nineteen hundred years since the preaching of Christ has not overturned the law which forbids the grape to spring from thorns or the fig from thistles.

A word or two on the subject of Browning's religion may be relevant to the point we have reached in the handling of the poet's ethics. That Browning was orthodox in early and middle life is a matter of certainty rather than a question; and the reason is as clear and simple as the fact. It agrees with all the harmonies and sequences of things that a nature which beheld in contact with human personalities a leading source of moral growth should find its aliment and consolation in a creed which clothes its God in human form and regards communion with this mixed and twofold personality as the chief means and best reward of moral evolution. There was another point of sympathy and correspondence between the poet's mind and the orthodox faith. I refer to one aspect of the story of the incarnation and the redemption which, though obvious and palpable enough, has been almost equally neglected by the defenders and the assailants of the doctrine. The conjunction of moral height and dramatic picturesqueness, the union of spiritual and romantic grandeur, which stands out so distinctly in the foreground of the story, has been overlaid and shadowed in the minds of both contestants — eclipsed in the orthodox by a feeling of its benefits, and effaced in the liberals by a sense of its fallacy. It was this aspect of the situation, its superlative and unequalled poetry that helped to win, and for a time at least, to hold, the loyalty of Browning. It must be remembered, however, that the fact of his orthodoxy is a great deal plainer than the fact of its continuance. No man of common sense who has

read the poems of 1850 and 1864 can doubt that the author of 'Christmas Eve,' and 'Easter Day,' and of 'A Death in the Desert,' concurred with the traditional view of Christ; no man of moderate fairness and acumen can read the volume of 1884 without suspecting that the author of 'Ferishtah's Fancies' had slipped away from his orthodox anchorage. The latter poem, which contains his ripest speculations abounds in interest and nutriment for those who wish to understand his creed. His solutions of the great inexorable problems are invariably positive and cheering; they depend on three great principles,— the explanation of the maimed and crooked present through the healing and rectifying future, the explanation of the jangle and medley of the outer world through the simplicity and oneness of the individual experience, and the justification of those human acts which seem to tally with the notion of a perfect God through their helpfulness and fitness to the nature of man. The tenor of the reasoning and the educed results is consistently and strongly optimistic.

The mention of optimism suggests a brief concluding glance at the last and best, as it is also the simplest and plainest, of the poet's helpful traits. He has given us the best of all resources, courage; and I do not hesitate to affirm that the pith of his service, the height of his accomplishment, consists in my judgment in the bestowal of this gift. Great as his poetry is in single efforts and exalted passages, it is open as a whole to the simple but searching criticism that you can remove nine-tenths of its bulk and preserve nine-tenths of its value. His philosophy has traits of greatness, but is scarcely lucid or coherent; one doubts its capacity to withstand the attacks of time or even to overcome the indifference of contemporaries. The strength and the usefulness of Browning are more truly exhibited in his attitude toward life. Amid the peevishness and moodiness of an overripe and self-distrusting age there has stepped forth a man who is thoroughly glad and strong,— glad in virtue of his strength and strong by reason of his gladness. Amid the pallid loveliness and gentle languor of the work of his contemporaries he appears (to reconstruct a metaphor of Lowell's) like the young David, ruddy and of a fair countenance, and bearing in his sling the smooth stones drawn from the clear brook which are to smite and fell the sturdy old Goliath of crabbedness and pessimism. Like David, too, he has the temper of a boy, a boy's delight in life and faith in the benevolence of destiny. In boyhood itself this temper is at once too natural and too common to deserve exceptional respect, but when the boyish feeling is united with the man's experience and the man's profundity, it gains at once the preciousness of rarity and the palm of moral elevation. The height of the faculty finds a clear exponent in the magnitude of the service. The need of our century is in all likelihood not so much more knowledge or more



enterprise, not so much more art or culture or poetry or even genius as the simple but momentous gift of courage,— the power to take life generously, to be glad in it, to love it, to thank God for it. That Browning should have felt thus and inspired others with this feeling is perhaps the strongest of his claims to enduring gratitude and honor. That life has justified itself to Browning is a cogent reason for esteeming life. The first stanza of 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' is a satisfying example of the union of his poetry, his philosophy, and his ethics in a half-dozen powerful and kindling aphorisms.

'Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made:  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half; trust God, see all, nor be afraid."'

# THE 'STORY' IN GEORGE MEREDITH

BY ALTA BRUNT SEMBOWER

**H**ERO-WORSHIPERS are of two sorts; those who insist that there is absolute perfection in the object of their admiration, and those who believe so thoroughly in the essential greatness of their ideal that they do not fear to grant a point or two against it. Lovers of George Meredith are of the latter class. They are quick to slip a note of apology or of explanatory deprecation into their praise of him. They wish to persuade the listener to read the man, for whatever reason, with whatever bias. Once safe within the Meredithian boundaries, they believe, the doubter will be in a fair way to become a settler there. No concessions will be made him then, but, happily, he will not then ask for any concessions. He will find that his questionings have ceased. Practice will teach him how to tread the way, and in a mood of fascinated acceptance of the terms of residence, he will roam that strange, brilliant country as freely as he is wont to enjoy a stroll in 'Mansfield Park,' a voyage to 'Treasure Island,' or a peep into the 'Old Curiosity Shop.'

It is a large hope, but the Meredith lover cherishes it, and his faith deserves a hearing. There is no doubt that a temporary (at least) acceptance of an author's terms is the first requisite for appreciation of his work. You cannot be carried, struggling,—like a cat in a basket,—through a stretch of fine landscape, and do justice to the view. At best, you can only sight landmarks by which to find a way back to the starting point. And the hesitants to Meredith are peculiarly loath to leave their starting point. Chasms and rocks appear before them, forbidding them to take even the first step away from it. They wait, fearful, but very curious about the land ahead, until the zealot lures them forward with a promise to show them a way round the obstacles.

His first precept, as a rule, is 'to read for the idea.' Children who are puzzled by the Bible are sometimes urged to read 'for the story.' But if beginners in Meredith were told to read for the story they would probably reply that they could not find the story for the words. They are more hopeful of finding the idea, because they are used to looking for ideas in obscure surroundings, and also because they know that to get an idea they need give only attention—they need not promise sympathy. They, therefore, read for the idea, and they find, without doubt, a rich reward. They read in 'Richard Feverel' that a man may not play providence to his

son; in 'Evan Harrington' that the accident which shows to youth its real condition with no softening veil over it is not a cruel thing but a guide to opportunity; in 'Diana of the Cross-ways' that law, in dealing with flesh and blood, may commit terrible mistakes; in 'Lord Ormont and his Aminta' that pride, however justly resentful, may not with impunity turn all things to its revenge; in 'The Amazing Marriage' that one who trifles with a precious opportunity cannot always count upon a second chance. Besides these well-defined ideas, there are so many of a more elusive kind, suggested or glanced at by the writer in passing, revealed in the conversation or the private notebooks of the most consciously intellectual of the characters, that it is no wonder that readers for the idea find their task so enormous and so satisfying that even though they should grant the presence of other beauties, they have no time to look at them. They are kept busy sorting and arranging their finds, placing most of them in two or three large classes of ideas concerning society and life, and preserving the rest as scattered bits of evidence to be used in the event — which is sure to rise out of all this work — of trying to determine the writer's philosophy.

Meantime, there is—in some literary Utopia where dwell the readers to whom the author really writes — another person who does not read Meredith for the idea, nor for the story, nor for the style, but for all of these and more. And if you were to say to this reader that you had placed Meredith among the immortals solely because of his intellect, he would reply that if Meredith's intellectual appeal is persistent, it is none the less an appeal which has its definite limitations; an appeal made to certain faculties of the mind to the exclusion of certain other faculties. It is, so to speak, interested in drawing ideas to the surface, rather than in delving into the innermost recesses of the mind. Meredith is brilliantly psychological, rather than subtly so. Truth is not always hidden; it lies open to the gaze, often, so plain that to the majority of observers it seems negligible. Meredith's mission — like that of Carlyle and Ruskin — is rather to cry out the value of neglected obvious things than to discover hidden ones. He verges nearer to the melodramatic than to the esoteric. At his best he is broadly and truly dramatic. His analysis is an analysis of the individual in relation to certain large institutions, to society, to the human race; it is not an analysis of the individual in relation to himself.

An interesting comparison might be drawn between him and another of our 'intellectuals'—that master of subtlety, Mr. Henry James. The latter, in his novels, depicts a world in which expression makes use of more delicate instruments than words. We none of us deny that such a world exists round about us, as invisible but as inevitable as the air. But few of us can discuss it without losing, as we speak, a sense of its reality. We



do not know its terms; its finer meanings slip between our words. But Mr. James deals boldly with it, as old china dealers handle fragile pieces certainly. It is tangible to him, and full of form and color. It is not a world of thoughts and evanescent happenings; it is a world of adventure and romance. Two persons sitting together in quiet talk may be the actors in a stirring drama. Not because they are plotting crimes, or planning schemes, but because there is passing between them — apart from their words — certain influences which leave them, when they part, other than they were when they met. It happens so in life, but we are wont to think that such influences are easily shaken off, and that the motives of our actions arise from more obvious sources. Mr. James has faith in the practical importance of the inner self. He is its prophet as well as its spokesman.

But Meredith introduces us to no such incorporeal world. His characters are notable for a peculiar robustness and physical capacity. Intellect is required by him, also; it is a unification of mental and physical that he insists upon. 'Great Mother Nature has given a house of iron to this soul of fire,' he makes Tracy Runningbrook say of Emilia, but he chooses to take for granted the intellectual power of his characters, and to lay stress upon their physical gifts. 'I told you that she could talk, sir,' said Andrian Harley of Lucy, to Sir Austin Feverel. 'She thinks!' said the baronet. But this is only one reference to intellect, as compared with many describing Lucy's visible loveliness, and perfect womanly normality. Health is to Meredith almost a synonym for beauty — almost a synonym, in fact, for virtue. Laetitia Dale, with drooping eyelids and weary delicacy of frame, is less worth saving from the toils of the egoist than Clara Middleton, young, vigorous, and blundering. Meredith's scholars — a class of which, according to his definition of them, he is very fond — are healthy moralists rather than metaphysicians. He rids Vernon Whitford of a troubled vision of Clara's lovely face by making him 'walk it off.' 'He was a man of quick pace,' says Meredith, 'the sovereign remedy for the dispersing of mental fen-mist.' Dr. Middleton and Dr. Shrapnel, aged seers as they are, have greater interest in finding remedies for obvious ills than in discovering subtle tendencies of thought. There are few crimes in Meredith like that in Mr. James's story of the 'Beast in the Jungle' (to select at random a story which, though slight, seems in a rather bare way typical of Mr. James), in which John Marcher, in the face of a distinct foreboding that he is marked out for a peculiar doom, finds it by watching so keenly for his danger that in the meantime life with its common joys and sorrows passes him by. This is kindred to the unpardonable sin of 'Ethan Brand.' But Meredith has little or none of the mysticism which is at the heart of both these stories. His crimes are such as that of Ormont, who sulked like Achilles in his tent

while the battle was still unwon; of Victor Radnor and of Alvan, who affected, even to themselves, to despise public opinion and yet steered their ships by it upon the rocks; of Willoughby, whose egoism was so apparent that all the world smiled, and shook its head at him; of men in general, who by unjust laws and a primitive attitude toward women, drive the latter into an unworthy counter-attitude. His subtlest faults are such as that of Sir Austin Feverel, who admitted no element in life which could not be brought under a rule; of Lord Fleetwood, who 'held a costly thing in the hand and dashed it to the ground.' But there is nothing vague or intangible in the results of Sir Austin's presumptuous blunder, nor anything merely psychical about Lord Fleetwood's punishment. One looks in vain — one almost wishes — for a subtle motive when obvious ones strike one too sharply in the face. Diana sells her lover's public secret for money because she is in need of it — at best because she has been twitted by the editor who buys it for knowing no secrets of importance. There is no hidden excuse, no other explanation, unless we admit that one of doubtful legitimacy in art — that she is copied from a character in history who committed that incomprehensible mistake. Edward Blancove tires of Dahlia Fleming for the old reason of such lovers through the ages — he undervalues fruit which falls too quickly into the hand. Meredith, in dealing with such thin places as writers are likely to come upon in their most carefully woven plots, chooses to risk plain motives rather than involved ones. He relies upon his reader's confidence, treating such spots as dealers treat worn places in oriental fabrics, without concealment, relying upon the independent value of the remaining stuff. Meredith relies very little, in any case, upon the interest of concealment or mystery. His characters are sometimes bewildered by each other, but the reader is always in the secret. There is in 'The Egoist' a situation in which six persons talk at cross-purposes; the reader has the key to all the speeches. Meredith wishes his reader to see clearly each step of the story as it goes along. His request is merely that he shall be followed faithfully. 'It is the conscience residing in thoughtfulness,' he says, 'that I appeal to.' But it is by very brilliantly-colored and unmistakable signs that he indicates, to an interested eye, the stages of his thought.

His favorites, particularly among women, are simple, direct, and single minded. Lucy is so, and Aminta; Carinthia is goddess-like in her unwavering standard of right; Emilia is elemental; Rhoda Fleming is a rustic prototype of the latter two; Rose Jocelyn is as yet a child, but she has already displayed an 'intrepid directness' of character; Clara Middleton, though a somewhat undeveloped personage, is bewildered by the Egoist's mental twists and turns, because of her own natural simplicity; Diana, brilliant and gifted, is praised no less for being peculiarly straightforward and un-

affected. These are Meredith's heroines. He may delight in the sharp wit of Mrs. Monstuart Jenkinson, the preternatural intrigue of the Countess de Saldar, the keen strong-mindedness of Lady Charlotte Eglett, but he does not offer them to our affection. Rosamund Culling, with her saddened insight, and Nataly Radnor, experienced in anguish, are types of feminine critics whom he represents as lovable, and they and Emma Dunstane, Diana's friend and counsellor, have the simplicity of standard which is a large factor in Meredith's definition of feminine charm.

Among his men, Whitford and Weyburn, though by profession scholars, are by disposition clear-eyed students of the simple problems of life; Redworth and Robert Eccles are in danger of seeming dull in their thorough-going credulity and plain honesty; Beauchamp and Victor Radnor are martyrs to their belief in the bold and open stroke in public life; Willoughby and Fleetwood are discredited for an over-tendency to self-indulgence through self-analysis; Lord Ormont is saved to our love and pity by the fact that he fails as a husband, not because of a scheming selfishness, but because of a large blindness and undesigning obstinacy. Meredith has a weakness for a bit of bluster in his men. Ormont's trouble with his country is due to his high-handedness, and it is plain that his creator, as well as Aminta, bears him no dislike for that. The 'Old Buccaneer,' who appears in 'The Amazing Marriage' only in such remembered sayings as that doughty one, 'If you would forgive your enemy, do him an injury,' is referred to with evident tenderness and admiration. Alvan — of 'The Tragic Comedians' — is a heroic figure moving like a hurricane through a forest, carrying things crashing before him. A rising statesman, he has heard of Clotilde von Rudiger, a brilliant young debutante, as a possible match for him. The two meet at a ball in Berlin. Alvan delivers himself to some friends of his view of Hamlet. Clotilde contradicts him. Freeing himself from the others, he speaks to her alone. "Hamlet in due season," said he. . . . "I shall convince you." She shook her head. "Yes, yes; an opinion formed by a woman is inflexible, I know; the fact is not half so stubborn. But at present there are two more important actors; we are not at Elsinore. You are aware that I wished to meet you?" A moment later, "And tell me," said he, "as to meeting me." . . . She replied, "When we are so like the rest of the world, we may confess our weakness." "Unlike," says Alvan, "for the world and I meet and part; not we two." He finishes by conducting her, at the end of the entertainment, to her home. 'He laughed to hear her say, "I feel that I am carried away by a centaur."' "

Contrast this scene with that one in Mr. James's story (mentioned above), in which John Marcher and May Bartram renew an acquaintance — which has been merely casual — after a ten years' interval. He comes



upon her at a country house where, as a relation of the hostess, she has the task of helping to show the establishment. In a lapse of the conventionalities she drifts toward him, with a dim recognition of his dawning interest in her. 'By the time they at last thus came to speech they were alone in one of the rooms — remarkable for a fine portrait over the chimneypiece — out of which their friends had passed, and the charm of it was that even before they had spoken they had practically arranged with each other to stay behind for talk. The charm, happily, was in other things, too; it was partly in there being scarce a spot at Weatherend without something to stay for. It was in the way the autumn day looked into the high windows as it waned; in the way the red light, breaking at the close from under a low, sombre sky, reached out in a long shaft and played over old wainscots, old tapestries, old gold, old color. It was, most of all, perhaps, in the way she came to him, as if since she had been turned on to deal with the simpler sort he might, should he choose to keep the whole thing down, just take her mild attention for a part of the general business.' This situation, like that cited from Meredith, is one in which two persons arrive quickly at a close relationship through an intuitive sympathy. But the manner of Mr. James — painting deliberately upon an exquisite background one of those golden pictures, moderated by excess of care, but to a keen eye showing perfect in line, and true in color — differs from Meredith's bold delineation as the afternoon of an Italian springtime differs from a crackling, cold winter morning in the north.

Meredith's appeal would seem, therefore, to be to the reader who likes strong and simple effects. But he fails to reach this reader partly through excess of zeal. He is so partial to the concrete image, so sensible of analogies between the mental and the physical world, that in his desire to be easily understood, he translates all things into physical terms. And after all, the natural man — with whom it might seem that such a practice could be highly successful — is used to making a distinction between the inner and the outer world; he may conceive of thought as having wings because the image has been familiarized by convention, but he does not so easily imagine it as having all the other attributes of both body and mind; such an insistence comes to irritate him — it is, after all, not calling a spade a spade. A young woman who was being taken to task for having found Meredith too difficult, was asked if she could find anything more simply vivid and adventurous in literature than the scene of the swimming match between Weyburn and Aminta; she replied with a question: 'Was that a real swim, then? I must have known when I was reading it. But I've kept the impression, somehow, that it was a symbolic thing.' There lies the difficulty of Meredith. He is not too intellectual; he is almost too phys-



ical. He translates all inner action into outer terms so vividly that when he comes to deal actually with outer things he has no means to make the difference felt. The reader has become trained to see the picture, and to feel the thrill, but after a time he sees the picture and feels the thrill without realizing whether they are immediate factors in the simple narrative, or whether they are illustrations of states of mind — which are factors in the story, also, beyond doubt, but are a degree removed from the scene of real action, prompters of the players on the stage. Meredith loves, as he says, to 'spring imagination with a word or phrase,' but the imagination, treated so, is exercised — as the word 'springs' truthfully implies — in leaps and bounds, not in the long stretch of — for instance — one of Jane Austen's straightforward narratives.

Nevertheless, there is a 'story' in each of Meredith's novels, and if there were not so many glinting stones along the way one might see the long reach of it. There is a peculiarly dramatic action, and there are passionate scenes and intense descriptions which are simply intended to advance the story, with no glancing motive of illuminating social questions, or of commenting upon problems of life. That double-blossom wild cherry tree, Whitford's 'holy-tree,' — under which Clara Middleton found the young man sleeping, and, herself gazing up into the white cloud of blossom, came to the conclusion that 'he must be good who loves to lie and sleep beneath the branches of this tree,' — was a real tree, and furnished an unconscious motive for Clara's revolt scarcely less potent than her gradual realization that she was betrothed to a relentless egoist. The river beside which Lucy and Richard Feverel met was real — and real the dewberries which stained her happy lips; real, too — alas! — was that ill-starred wedding ring which it cost poor Mrs. Berry such bitter pangs to lose, and gentle Lucy scarcely less bitter pangs to keep. The 'Battle of the Ring,' fought out between soft-hearted Mrs. Berry and the tender but determined little bride, comes nearer to nature than it is the fate of many scenes in literature to come. It has for precedent only such situations as that in which Desdemona sings to Emilia as the latter prepares her for bed, and that in which Lear, with faith not yet broken, appeals to Regan against Goneril's cruelty. In such scenes the author puts aside the natural man's repugnance to tasting the flavor of pain and tenderness combined, and drinks before his readers of a fountain whose waters are bitter-sweet from flowing about the most subterranean rocks of experience. The bell which in that mountain village roused Diana and Percy Dacier from sleep, and sent them out to meet each other's most emotional selves beside a romantic pool, was not a symbolic bell; it was a physical motive for action such as one comes upon in Meredith again and again. His work is full of those accidents of circumstance

which, as he believes, are placed not so much by chance as by fate along the way of life. Accidents like that of Ormont's and Aminta's meeting at Steignton Hall; of Clara's prevented flight to London; of Diana's interrupted journey to the continent with Dacier; of the child's danger which brought Beauchamp's brilliant career to an end; of the futile duel which cost Richard and Lucy their last chance of happiness.

Such a belief in the weight of circumstance places Meredith in the face of his own insistence upon narrative as 'the vehicle of philosophy,' in the ranks of those novelists who write because they have a story to tell. 'Romance,' according to R. L. Stevenson, 'is the poetry of circumstance'; Meredith's work lifts circumstance to the dignity of epic or the drama. Nature he calls 'the creator,' circumstance 'the sculptor,' the two combining to make the youth a man, provided he has 'the heart to take and keep an impression.' The working out of these two forces is what too many readers 'for the idea' in Meredith ignore or underestimate. He himself, in his constant comment upon 'his mission' as a writer, seems to underestimate it. But readers for his whole effect will not neglect it. They may remember, for their justification, that it is, after all, upon the gayly-painted boat of fiction that he has chosen to set sail with them upon the sea of literature; not upon the sober brig of the essayist, nor upon the tall ship of the philosopher. They will not be diverted by the wise sayings of their captain from remembering that his craft is bound for the romantic waters of imagined experience, and that it floats the simple flag of 'truth to nature' from the mast.



# EVENTIDE

BY PAUL VERLAINE

(*Translated by William Raleigh Price*)

Let the shades of eventide  
Falling from the lofty pines  
Penetrate our love; abide  
Calm and still while day declines.

Blend our hearts' deep happiness  
And our souls in ecstasy  
With the silent dreariness  
Of the pines and shrubbery;

And, with eyes half closed, now keep,  
Love, thy arms crossed on thy breast;  
Banish from thy heart asleep  
All design, and be at rest.

Be persuaded by the breeze  
Gently swaying, soft and sweet,  
Rippling here beneath the trees  
Russet grass spires at thy feet;

And, when solemn oak trees fling  
Mantling darkness through the air,  
Nightingales near by will sing,  
Voicing, Love, our dark despair.